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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Cong manifesto promises economic reset

Cong assures govt change in Manipur, right to apprenticeship and same-sex marriage

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP), and passing a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs are among the promises made by Congress in its manifesto for Lok Sabha polls released on Friday.

The manifesto, focusing on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under them, was released at the AICC headquarters in the presence of Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

In the document titled Nyay Patra, Opposition party said it would implement 10 per cent quota in jobs, educational institutions for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) for all castes, communities without discrimination if it comes to power.

It also promised to fill nearly 30,00,000 vacancies in sanctioned posts at various levels in the central government and said the Rajasthan model of cashless insurance of up to Rs 25,00,000 will be adopted for universal healthcare.

Congress promises to expand Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution to prohibit discrimination on the ground of 'disability', 'impairment' or 'sexual orientation'.

Congress will pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC if it comes to power in the general elections beginning April 19, the party promised.

The Congress also said it will conduct a nationwide socio-economic and caste census. Appealing to people to look beyond religion, language, caste and choose wisely to install a democratic government, the party said the general elections present an opportunity to radically the change the style of governance that has been in evidence over the past decade.

It said it guarantees a new 'right to apprenticeship act' to provide one-year apprenticeship to every diploma holder or graduate below age of 25.

Besides, it said it will give legal guarantee to MSP announced by the government every year as recommended by the Swaminathan Commission.

The party has said it would immediately remove the present state government in Manipur and heal wounds between the Meiteis and Kukis, who have been fighting since May 2023. The party said in the document that it would abolish the Agnipath programme and direct the armed forces to resume normal recruitment to achieve full sanctioned strength. —*PTI*

Congress senior party leaders P Chidambaram, Sonia Gandhi, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, and Rahul Gandhi with others release the party's manifesto ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in New Delhi on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Cong manifesto is 'bundle of lies', says BJP

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

BJP on Friday dubbed Congress' manifesto a "bundle of lies" and alleged that the grand old party which ruled the country for several decades did not not fulfil any of the promises made in its earlier manifestos for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said that Congress has come with such a poll manifesto to create confusion among the voters. "It has been prepared to create confusion among the voters," he said. —*PTI*

RBI holds repo rate at 6.5% for 7th time

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday kept the benchmark interest rates unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the seventh time in a row and flagged concerns over food inflation in view of IMD's prediction of above normal maximum temperatures during April to June.

As RBI has held key policy rates steady, EMIs on home and auto loans are likely to remain stable for some more time. The central bank has kept interest rates unchanged since February 2023. While unveiling the first bi-monthly monetary policy for the current financial year, the RBI has retained its growth and inflation forecast for the current fiscal at 7 per cent and 4.5 per cent, respectively.

"After a detailed assessment of the evolving macroeconomic and financial developments and the outlook, it (MPC) decided by a 5 to 1 majority to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said. He further said that the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) would remain focused on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation progressively aligns to the target, while supporting growth.

Commenting on RBI's decision, SBI Chairman Dinesh Khara said the status quo should be seen as an affirmation of goldilocks for India with high growth and low inflation in FY25 and FY26. The review of the liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) framework with the advent of 24/7 payment systems could act as a positive enabler to address frictional liquidity mismatches, Khara said.

While announcing the policy, Das said recent events outside the country have indicated that depositors withdraw or transfer their deposits using digital channels in the event of any stress quickly, and announced the review for ensuring that banks do not suffer in instances of "acute stress".

Referring to inflation, Das said food price uncertainties continue to weigh on the inflation trajectory going forward.

Also, the tight demand-supply situation in pulses and the production of key vegetables warrant close monitoring, given the forecast of above normal temperatures during summer. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CONG MOVES EC AGAINST 'THE KERALA STORY' ON DOORDARSHAN

T'PURAM, 5 APRIL

Congress in Kerala on Friday approached the Election Commission of India (ECI) against the decision of Doordarshan to telecast the controversial movie 'The Kerala Story', saying it was a "tacit effort" to divide society on religious grounds to further the electoral prospects of the ruling BJP.

The decision of Doordarshan evoked strong protests from both the ruling CPI(M) and the Opposition Congress in Kerala. Doordarshan has announced that the movie will be broadcast on 5 April.

Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the ruling CPI(M) expressed strong protest on Friday against the decision to telecast the movie and said it would organise a protest march to the Doordarshan office in the state capital.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, VD Satheesan, sent a letter to the ECI today, seeking to direct Doordarshan to withdraw from its decision to telecast "the extremely malicious 'The Kerala Story' movie". "The decision of Doordarshan is a direct insult to the people of Kerala. It is also in violation of model poll conduct, which forbids any effort to divide society on religious lines," the senior Congress leader said. —*PTI*

JAMAT-UL-VIDA 2024

Devotees offer 'Alvida Jummah' namaz on the last Friday in the holy month of Ramadan, at Makkah Masjid in old city of Hyderabad on Friday ***PHOTO: ANI***

NIA identifies Rameshwaram blast accused

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has identified Mussavir Hussain Shazib as the key accused who carried out the blast at a cafe in Bengaluru on 1 March and Abdul Matheen Taahaa as the co-conspirator.

As part of the efforts to locate and arrest the absconding accused persons, NIA has conducted searches at 18 locations in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, an NIA spokesperson said. In the Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, the NIA has identified the accused person who carried out the IED blast as Mussavir Hussain Shazib and the co-conspirator as Abdul Matheen Taahaa, both residents of Thirthahalli in Shivamogga district of Karnataka.

Several people were injured in the blast at the cafe located at ITPL Road, Brookefield. Further, as part of the investigation, Muzammil Shareef, a resident of Khalsa, Chikkamagaluru, who extended logistics support to the main accused persons, was arrested on March 26 and was examined in police custody, the spokesperson said.

The agency declared rewards of Rs 10,00,000 on information leading to the arrest of each of the absconders on 29 March. The NIA has been summoning and examining all acquaintances, including college and school friends, of the absconding and arrested accused persons to gather evidence and information in the case, the spokesperson said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: BCCI

IPL matches in Bengaluru under NGT scanner

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Amidst the worsening water crisis in the City, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Karnataka State Cricket Association and other State authorities concerned to furnish details of water being used at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium during the IPL matches here. Apart from State Cricket Association, NGT has also asked the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to submit the particulars about the quantity and source of the water by 2 May. "We are studying the notice, and as such the stadium complies with the NGT norms. So, we are confident of going ahead with the matches," said Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) CEO Shubendu Ghosh. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Rajasthan school bars rape victim from taking exams

JAIPUR, 5 APRIL

A class 12 student of a private school in Ajmer, Rajasthan, could not take her board examinations as her school principal banned her from attending classes after she was allegedly gang-raped, stating that her presence would "spoil the atmosphere", officials said on Friday. The school removed her name and issued a transfer certificate due to which the victim could not appear for her board examinations. The matter came to light when the victim and her father approached District Child Welfare Committee's president Anjali Sharma. The victim in her complaint said that the school principal told her not to attend the classes as her presence would "spoil the atmosphere". The girl was allegedly gang-raped in October last year and the accused were arrested. —*PTI*

TEXTBOOK REVISION

NCERT drops references to Babri, Guj riots

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Dropping references to the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the killing of Muslims in Gujarat riots and Hindutva, and tweaking the reference to Manipur's merger with India are among the latest set of revisions made public by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in its textbooks.

The officials said the tweaks are part of the routine updation and are not linked to the development of new books as per the New Curriculum Framework (NCF). The changes have been made in Political Science textbooks of classes 11 and 12, besides others.

Chapter 8 on Secularism in class 11 textbook earlier said, "More than 1,000 persons, mostly Muslims, were massacred during the post Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002."

It has been changed to "more than 1,000 persons were killed during the post Godhra riots in Gujarat in 2002". The NCERT's rationale behind the change is "in any riots people across communities suffer. It cannot be just one community".

On Manipur, the earlier textbook stated, "The Government of India succeeded in pressurising the Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement in September 1949, without consulting the popularly elected Legislative Assembly of Manipur. This caused a lot of anger and resentment in Manipur, the repercussions of which are still being felt."

The changed version says, "The Government of India succeeded in persuading the Maharaja into signing a Merger Agreement in September 1949." In chapter 8, Recent Developments in Indian Politics, references to the "Ayodhya demolition" has been dropped.

"What is the legacy of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the Ayodhya demolition for the nature of political mobilisation?" has been changed to "What is the legacy of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement?".

The series of changes will now be introduced in the books which are yet to hit the market even as the new session has already begun. —*PTI*

The officials said the tweaks are part of the routine updation ***PHOTO: PTI***

Atishi gets EC notice over BJP 'poaching' remark

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Election Commission (EC) on Friday issued a showcause notice to Delhi Minister and Aam Admi Party (AAP) leader Atishi, asking her to back with facts her statement that BJP approached her to join the party.

BJP moved the poll commission a day back against Atishi's "false statement" that the party had reached out to her through someone close and asked her to join it.

EC notice to Atishi read, "... you are a Minister in the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi and leader of a National Party. The electors tend to believe whatever is being said from public forum by their leaders and in that sense the statements made by them affect the campaign discourse."

On 2 AprilAtishi leader claimed that BJP approached her to either join party or be prepared to be nabbed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) within a month. "I was approached by the BJP through a person very close to me who asked me to join the BJP to save and enhance my political career or I will be arrested within a month," she said at a press conference. In its notice to AAP leader, the poll authority told her that the matter was being examined in light of the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct and relevant electoral laws. Atishi has been asked to respond by Monday noon. —*PTI*

Atishi ***PHOTO: ANI***

>>>More on Page 3

IMD predicts rains after Ugadi

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Bengaluru residents can expect some respite from the scorching heat as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts scattered rainfall post-Ugadi, the Karnataka New Year which will fall on 9 April this year. However, citizens may have to endure a few more days of discomfort, potentially even hotter nights before the arrival of the showers. A Prasad, an official with the IMD told Salar News "We anticipate a shift in weather patterns around second week of April. While the immediate forecast suggests dry conditions, there's a good chance of the City experiencing light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms." Prasad cautioned that the initial showers might be accompanied by strong wind.—*Salar News*

Man cuts birthday cake with sword, arrested

KALABURAGI, 5 APRIL

The Sedam police has apprehended an individual who for brandishing a sword and using it to cut his birthday cake in public. after it circulated wThe video of the incident went viral on social media, creating panic among public. Ramu, alias Ramesh Injallikar, recorded a video of himself cutting a cake while holding a sword on his birthday. PSI Thirumalesh and social media monitoring team alerted SP Akshay Haque, Additional SP N Srinidhi, Hiremath, and CPI Manjunatha. In response to the growing trend of individuals using fake pistols, swords, and other weapons to celebrate occasions and posting such activities on social media, the police have intensified surveillance efforts. Hawke has directed the deployment of a dedicated team at each police station, including Sedam, tasked with monitoring the online activities of individuals. Salar News—*Salar News*

9 JD(S) Channapatna leaders join Cong

RAMANAGARA, 5 APRIL

In a substantial blow to JD (S), in Ramanagara as nine members of Channapatna city municipal council, who were formerly associated with JD (S), joined Congress. The event took place in the presence of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) President, DK Shivakumar, and MLC Puttanna at Shivakumar's residence in Sadashivanagar on Thursday night. The individuals who joined Congress include Revanna MJ, A Satish Babu, Srinivasamurthy, Lokesh CJ, Nagesh, Syed Rafique Ahmed K, Abhidabanu, and Bhanupriya. Channapatna Municipal Council Chairman Prashant P and non-party member Uma also joined Congress. —*Salar News*

Four arrested in CSR trust fraud scheme

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Halasuru police arrested four people, including a woman, for allegedly cheating charitable trusts under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) donations. The scam came to light after Shankarananda Ashram Trust filed a complaint against a company named Expeditors International India Pvt Ltd. The trust alleged that the company had taken Rs 15 lakh as processing fees for a promised donation but later backed out, citing incomplete formalities. The trust also reported that a lawyer sent to inquire about the donation was assaulted and threatened. Police found that the accused used forged documents from companies such as JSW Steel and Mahindra Susten Pvt Ltd. The investigation suggests this may be a wider operation, targeting multiple trusts with the promise of large donations. The arrests have exposed a concerning scam targeting charitable institutions and highlight the importance of thorough verification before accepting donations. —*Salar News*

Cholera concerns rise in water-stressed City

Ongoing water crisis could be compromising hygiene

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Bengaluru is grappling with a potential health crisis as reports of cholera cases emerge amid a City-wide water shortage and rising temperatures. While officials maintain there's no confirmed outbreak, a recent hospitalisation with suspected cholera and a confirmed case earlier in April have sparked public concern.

On 30 March, a 27-year-old woman residing in a private paying guest (PG) accommodation in Malleswaram experienced vomiting and sought treatment at a private hospital. Health Department issued a clarification regarding a media report on this suspected cholera case. Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has directed the health officials to conduct surveillance and supervision as a precautionary measure. BBMP also told the health officials to form Assembly constituency/zone-level rapid response teams to deal with any possible outbreak.

Experts warn that the current conditions are ripe for a cholera outbreak. "Cholera is an acute diarrhoeal illness caused by contaminated water or food," said Dr Asha Benakappa, paediatric consultant of Dr Chandramma Dayananda Sagar Institute of Medical Education and Research, Kanakapura.

"The ongoing water crisis in the City could be compromising hygiene standards, especially at eateries that rely on external water sources. It can cause severe diarrhoea and vomiting leading to dehydration."

PHOTO: PTI

Department of Public Health Services, in their media release on 5 April, confirmed 21 cases of cholera registered across the City, with one case registered in February and 20 cases being registered in March. Officials said these are sporadic occurrences and not an outbreak. They cite the absence of a significant increase in vomiting and diarrhoea cases compared to previous years.

Despite the lack of a declared outbreak, the authorities are taking precautionary measures. Public health workers are disseminating information on preventing diarrhoea-like illnesses, particularly during the hot summer months. Hospitals are well-stocked with necessary medicines, Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS), and intravenous fluids. —*Salar News*

STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY:

Dos:

1. Wash hands frequently. Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
2. Drink safe water. Boil water for at least 1 minute or use a reliable purifier.
3. Practice good sanitation. Keep your surroundings clean and dispose of waste properly.
4. Cook food thoroughly. Ensure meats and seafood are cooked to safe internal temperatures.
5. Wash fruits and vegetables. Clean all produce thoroughly before consumption. 6. Seek immediate medical attention if you experience persistent diarrhoea or vomiting.

Don'ts:

1. Avoid drinking water directly from taps, open wells or untreated sources.
2. Eating raw or undercooked food. Especially avoid uncooked seafood and street food with questionable hygiene.
3. Sharing utensils or towels; this can easily spread germs.
4. Ignoring hygiene practices.
5. Self-medication. Seek professional medical guidance if you experience symptoms.
6. Panicking. While vigilance is important, remain calm and follow the recommended precautions.

—*Salar News*

BOOST TO JD(S)

Independent MP Sumalatha joins BJP in Mandya

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

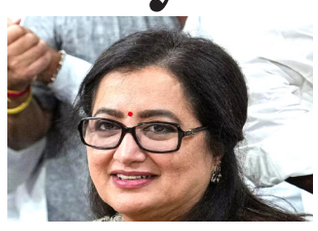
Actor-turned-politician and Independent MP from Mandya in Karnataka Sumalatha Ambareesh on Friday joined BJP, in a boost to the NDA ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Terming it an "important and good day" in her political life, the 60-year-old said she is deeply inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, his dream for the country by 2047 and his dedication towards it.

"Listening to his (Modi) speeches in the parliament, I have been inspired and I have understood things. Considering all these things, I felt joining BJP would be a right choice for me," she said, as she also thanked several state leaders including former chief ministers B S Yediyurappa, Basavaraj Bommai and DV Sadanada Gowda for their cooperation.

Veteran BJP leader Yediyurappa, State President BY Vijayendra, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly R Ashoka, National General Secretary in-charge of elections in Karnataka Radha Mohan Das Agarwal and Gowda were among those who welcomed her into the party fold at its state headquarters here.

With BJP ceding Mandya seat to its alliance partner JD(S) in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Sumalatha, after consulting her supporters and wellwishers in Mandya, on Wednesday announced her decision to opt out of the elections, and join BJP.



Sumalatha PHOTO: PTI

The wife of popular film star MH Ambareesh, Sumalatha had earlier staked claim for BJP ticket for re-election from the Mandya seat that was represented by her late husband in the past. But the party convinced her and gave it to JD(S).

As an independent candidate, Sumalatha had won the seat in 2019 by defeating the then Chief Minister Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil Kumaraswamy of JD(S), by a margin of 1,25,876 votes, with BJP's support.

Sumalatha entered politics in 2019 and plunged into the poll arena as an independent, after Congress, of which her late husband was a part, denied her the ticket, as the party had left the Mandya seat to its then alliance partner JD(S).

—*PTI*

Staying in NDA depends on how BJP treats us: Kumaraswamy

MANDYA, 5 APRIL

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy has said he is sincerely working for NDA's better prospects in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and the continuation of alliance BJP, after the parliamentary elections, will depend on how his party and its leaders are treated.

The former chief minister further said that given an opportunity and if Prime Minister Narendra Modi has confidence in him, he wants to be the Agriculture Minister, in the event of NDA coming back to power at the Centre.

He said, "We being part of the NDA depends on how our party leaders are treated in the future. We are sincerely working and we want a long-standing relationship with BJP. But ultimately we will take a decision depending on how we are treated and how much respect we get from BJP."

JD(S) headed by former prime minister HD Deve Gowda joined BJP-led NDA in September last year.

As part of the seat-sharing agreement, BJP would contest in 25 constituencies and the JD(S) in the remaining three -- Mandya, Hassan and Kolar.

The JD(S) leader, who is an MLA from Channapatna in the neighbouring Ramanagara district, said he was under a lot of pressure from the people of Mandya to contest from there.

Kumaraswamy PHOTO: PTI

- JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy has said he is sincerely working for NDA's better prospects in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and the continuation of alliance BJP, after the parliamentary elections, will depend on how his party and its leaders are treated.

Stating that it is BJP which is the "natural ally" of JD(S) and not Congress, Kumaraswamy said his party has always fought the grand old party for the last 50 years.

Kumaraswamy also said the Congress in Karnataka had messed up the State's finances because of its guarantee schemes and the government doesn't have any funds for capital expenditure or development. —*PTI*

JD(S) BANKS ON FIRST FAMILY TO DELIVER FOR PARTY

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

A striking feature in the candidates list for the 26 April Lok Sabha elections is the presence of members of Janata Dal (Secular)'s first family.

Former prime minister and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda's son HD Kumaraswamy, son-in-law CN Manjunath and grandson Prajwal Revanna are all in the fray.

While Kumararaswamy is contesting from Mandya, Prajwal Revanna is seeking re-election from Hassan.

Kumaraswamy's wife Anitha had represented Ramanagara as MLA in the previous Assembly, and Nikhil, who is JD(S) youth wing leader, had unsuccessfully contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls from Mandya and 2023 Assembly polls from Ramanagara.

This will be for the second consecutive time in the Lok Sabha elections, when three members from Gowda's family are in the fray from constituencies of the old-Mysuru region (south Karnataka), which is considered to be the party's stronghold, —*PTI*

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Congress Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with senior citizens at Kaggadaspur Park, Defence Colony Park during his election campaign on Friday. He also planted saplings PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Dalit Sangarsha Samithi backs Cong

KOLAR, 5 APRIL

Dalit Sangarsha Samithi (DSS) will support Congress candidates in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. A delegation of DSS leaders led by State Convener Hennur Srinivas, Kolar District DSS Convener Naganala Muniyappa and others met AICC General Secretary Randeep Surjewala and party in-charge Sudham Das in Bengaluru on Thursday evening. They said DSS has stood by Congress in the last Assembly elections and owing to their support 36 Congress candidates won the elections.

PHOTO: X/ @MLANAHARIS

The delegations told the Congress leaders they will support the party candidates in the State, especially in Tumakuru, Kolar, Chitradurga, Kolar and Bengaluru Rural district where there are large a number of Dalit voters. Congress leaders told the DSS leaders that they would direct the party candidates to take the DSS leaders into confidence while taking up campaigning in their respective constituencies. —Salar News

WATER CRISIS

IPL matches in City under NGT scanner

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Amidst the worsening water crisis in the City, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Karnataka State Cricket Association and other State authorities concerned to furnish details of water being used at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium during the IPL matches here.

Apart from State Cricket Association, NGT has also asked the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to submit the particulars about the quantity and source of the water by 2 May.

"We are studying the notice, and as such the stadium complies with the NGT norms. So, we are confident of going ahead with the matches," said Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) CEO Shubendu Ghosh. The Tribunal has taken suo motu cognizance after reports emerged that the Chinnaswamy Stadium has been getting treated water supply for IPL matches.

PHOTO: PTI

NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and A Senthil Vel (expert member) registered the case. Three matches have already been held at the venue, and it has been estimated that each of those games received 75,000 litres of treated water.

The stadium is scheduled to hold four more IPL matches on 15 April (vs Sunrisers Hyderabad), 4 May (vs Gujarat Titans), 12 May (vs Delhi Capitals) and 18 May (vs Chennai Super Kings). "We may require around 15000 litres of water for match purposes and it can be generated from the in-house STP plant," Ghosh had said earlier. —*PTI*

11 rescued after fire breaks out at RT Nagar building

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

Around 11 people were rescued after a fire broke out at the ground floor of a four-storey commercial building at RT Nagar here on Friday afternoon, officials said.

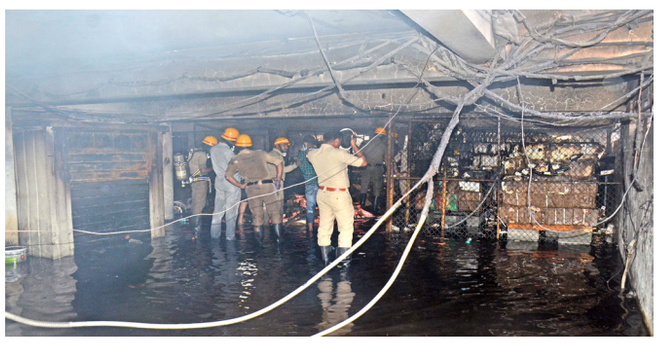
The fire at the building of Miracle Drinks Ayurvedic Clinic is believed to have originated from a short circuit, spread quickly, causing panic among those who were inside. The fire originated from the office of IDS software company located on the ground floor, according to Fire Department. The fire quickly spread to the basement, engulfing Ayurvedic medicines and six motorbikes stored there.

"The fire started around 12:45pm and as soon as the matter came to light, RT Nagar police reached the spot and started the rescue work." Four fire brigades reached the spot with more than 20 fire personnels, the fire personnel of RT Nagar told Salar News.

Seven people were initially trapped on the upper floors and were brought to safety using ladders. "People were evacuated to an adjacent building by ladder," the fire department official said.

There were no casualties in the fire. Eight people, including one in a more serious condition, were hospitalised after inhaling smoke. An investigation is underway to determine the exact cause of the fire.

—*Salar News*



Fire personal doused fire at a shop at RT Nagar in Bengaluru PHOTO: PTI

Case against trader who was attacked

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

A police complaint was filed against Mukesh, the trader who was attacked for allegedly playing Hanuman Chalisa at his shop in Nagarathpet here.

The FIR was registered at Halasuru Gate police station based on the complaint of the mother of Suleman who was part of a gang that attacked Mukesh on 17 March.

According to the complaint, Mukesh, despite being the month of Ramadan, continued to play devotional songs. .

The incident has garnered attention, with more than 500 people, including BJP MPs Tejasvi Surya and Shobha Karandlaje, staging a protest demanding the arrest of those who attacked Mukesh.

Taking to X, BJP's Karnataka unit said, "Protection for the wicked and punishment for the virtuous.

The Congress government has filed complaint against Mukesh who was inhumanly assaulted by jihadists and the Congress government is showing hatred towards Hindus."

—*Salar News*

Drug peddlers held across City

BENGALURU, 5 APRIL

In a series of successful operations, Bangalore police have arrested multiple individuals and seized significant quantities of illegal drugs across City.

The police arrested an Ivory Coast national following the seizure of contraband drugs valued at Rs 2 crore. City Police Commissioner B Dayananda said on Friday, Seka Ghislain Tano, 33, was nabbed in Bommanahalli on charges of drug peddling by a Central Crime Branch team of Bengaluru Police following a tip-off received by Anti-Narcotics wing of CCB. Police seized two kg of MDMA crystals, including white, brown, yellow, and pink ones, along with a mobile phone and a weighing machine. On the other hand Chennammanakere Achukattu police targeted a separate foreign national selling cocaine. The quantity seized was 81 grams worth Rs 6.5 lakh. Devanahalli police held two individuals selling cocaine on Prasannahalli Road. They seized 850 grams of cocaine worth Rs 80 lakh. The two arrested are currently in police custody for further investigation.

—*Salar News with PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Shashi Tharoor declares assets worth Rs 55 cr

T'PURAM, 5 APRIL

Shashi Tharoor, who is eyeing a fourth consecutive win from Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha seat, has declared assets of over Rs 55 crore in his nomination papers. The sitting Congress MP fromThiruvananthapuram also declared a total income of over Rs 4.32 crore in the financial year 2022-2023. Giving details of his assets and liabilities in the affidavit filed along with his nomination papers, Tharoor said he has movable assets of over Rs 49 crore that includes deposits of varying amounts in 19 bank accounts and investments in various bonds, debentures, he has said in his affidavit. His movable assets also include 534 grams of gold worth Rs 32 lakh and Rs 36,000 as cash in hand, according to his affidavit. His immovable assets are worth over Rs 6.75 crore which includes an inherited one-fourth share, now worth Rs 1.56 lakh, in a 2.51 acre agricultural land in Palakkad, a self acquired 10.47 acre land in Thiruvananthapuram that is presently worth over Rs 6.20 crore.—*PTI*

Trans to spread poll awareness in UP's Gonda

NOIDA, 5 APRIL

In a novel experiment, the Gonda administration in Uttar Pradesh would be engaging the transgender community to encourage people of the district, that has registered a low polling percentage in the past, to cast their vote in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. Gonda has 25.30 lakh registered voters and among those 13.50 lakh are males, 11.82 lakh females and 94 from the third gender. It goes to polls on May 20 in the fifth phase of the general elections. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the constituency had 17.70 lakh electors and recorded a voter turnout of 52.2 per cent, much below the state's average of 59.21 per cent. —*PTI*

Video of SP man threatening voters goes viral

BUDAUN, 5 APRIL

A video featuring SP candidate from Budaun Shivpal Yadav has gone viral on social media in which he can be heard saying "we will seek everyone's vote. If you vote for us, it is all right, otherwise, the matter will be settled later". In the video, Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA from Sahaswan Brajesh Yadav and Shivpal's son are also seen on the stage along with Shivpal Yadav. The place where Shivpal made the remarks is not clear in the video. The date when he made the remarks is also not clear. "I had only said for those who had become MLA after contesting the assembly elections as SP candidate, but had voted for other party," he said.—*PTI*

Brothers face each other in Odisha Assembly elections

BERHAMPUR, 5 APRIL

Chikiti Assembly constituency in Odisha's Ganjam district is all set to witness a contest between two brothers in the forthcoming elections to be held on 13 May. The brothers facing each other in the electoral battlefield are sons of former Odisha Assembly Speaker Chintamani Dyan Samantaray. While the opposition BJP has fielded younger brother Manoranjan Dyan Samantaray, his elder brother Ravindanath Dyan Samantaray has been picked up by the Congress. The Congress and BJP declared their candidatures on Tuesday. While junior Samantaray unsuccessfully contested the assembly elections twice his elder brother is contesting first time.

—*PTI*

BJP's main course yet to come: Modi

He said the country now is 'new India'

JAIPUR, 5 APRIL

Highlighting the work done by his government in the last 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said it was just an "appetiser" and the main course is yet to come. Addressing a rally in Churu, his second election rally in Rajasthan in three days, Modi also accused the Congress of insulting the Army and dividing people and said this represented the "identity" of the opposition party.

He further said that the country now is a "new India", which strikes within enemy territory – an apparent reference to counterstrikes in Pakistan after terror attacks in India. "Naya Bharat ghar mein ghus kar maarta hai."

"Today even the enemy knows that this is Modi, this is the new India," the Prime Minister added. Attacking the Congress, Modi said the country was in a bad condition when the party was in power.

"The economy had collapsed due to the Congress' big scams and loot. India's reputation in the world was declining... Even after so many decades of Independence, people were struggling for basic necessities of life," he added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a memento during a public meeting ahead of LS elections, in Churu, Rajasthan on Friday PHOTO: PTI

In a big crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic when the whole world thought India would be ruined, "we Indians made the country the fifth-largest economy in the world", he said.

Today, "Modi's guarantee" is being discussed in the country, he said, adding that Rajasthan is an example of how Modi's guarantees were fulfilled and at what speed.

"I gave a guarantee that cylinders for the poor will be cheaper, it has been fulfilled. An inquiry will be conducted against the Congress paper leak industry, it has been completed," Modi said.

The former Congress government in the state had stalled the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project but after the BJP came to power, not only has the project been approved but work has also started on it, he added. "Whatever the BJP says, it fulfils."

He also attack the Congress for its stand on the Ayodhya Ram temple issue.

Targeting the opposition INDIA bloc, he said, "I say remove corruption, they say save corruption." —*PTI*

'INDIA bloc fighting ideological battle'

Rahul says NDA will meet same fate as 2004

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the INDIA bloc has decided that its prime ministerial face will be decided by the alliance constituents jointly after it wins the polls and exuded confidence that the NDA's 2024 campaign will meet the same fate as that of 'India Shining' in 2004.

The former Congress chief said the Lok Sabha polls are between forces who are trying to "destroy" the Constitution and democracy in the country and those protecting them.

Speaking at the Congress manifesto launch programme, Gandhi said it is a much closer contest than what is propagated by the media, and expressed confidence of winning the polls.

Responding to a question after the release of the party manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, he said,

"We do believe that it is very important once this fight is won that we look after the interests of the vast majority of our people, that India is not run for two or three large conglomerates but is run for the vast majority of the people, that we are not a nation of monopolies, we are a nation where there is fair competition among businesses," he said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge releases party's manifesto ahead of LS Polls with leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi PHOTO: PTI

To a question on the outcome of the polls, Gandhi said unlike many political commentators he cannot predict the future but expressed confidence that this is a "much closer" election than what is being propagated by the media.

He said there was a similar feeling being generated by the press when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister in 2004 when there was the India Shining campaign.

"So, we have a similar idea being propagated, India Shining, with two-three new dimensions, with full support by the monopolists of the country. But do remember what happened to the India Shining campaign and do remember who won that campaign," Gandhi asserted.

Gandhi said it is important to understand that this is a fundamentally different election as democracy and Constitution have not been as much at risk as it is today.

—*PTI*

AAP CRISIS

'BJP conspired to put Kejriwal behind bars'

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

AAP MP Sanjay Singh on Friday said the senior leadership of the BJP hatched a conspiracy to put Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal behind bars in the excise policy case.

Addressing a press conference two days after coming out of jail, Singh accused the BJP of pressurising Raghav Magunta, who is an accused-turned-approver in the Delhi excise policy case, into giving a false statement against Kejriwal.

Singh, who was also arrested in connection with the case, said action was taken against Raghav Magunta's father -- YSR Congress Party Lok Sabha MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy -- on September 16, 2022.

"He was pressurised into giving a false statement against Kejriwal but when he refused, his son Raghav Reddy was arrested. After continuous questioning, Raghav Reddy changed his statement against Kejriwal and became a part of a larger conspiracy," Singh alleged.

"A big conspiracy has taken place to put Kejriwal behind bars. The BJP is responsible for the liquor scam and the senior leadership of the party is involved in this," he charged. Singh further said Kejriwal is an honest leader and wants to provide the best healthcare and education to the people of Delhi.

—*PTI*

- Singh further said Kejriwal is an honest leader and wants to provide the best healthcare and education to the people of Delhi

MP Sanjay Singh who was arrested in connection with the excise policy case addresses a press conference, in New Delhi, Friday PHOTO: PTI

Sunita Kejriwal, the best person to keep AAP together: Saurabh

New Delhi, 5 April

AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj has said that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita is the best person to keep the party together in the prevailing circumstances and asserted that her presence has had a "positive effect" on the cadre.

In an interaction with PTI editors at the agency's headquarters here, Bharadwaj, who is also a cabinet minister in the Delhi government, said Sunita Kejriwal has always said that she is the "messenger" of the Delhi chief minister who is currently in jail. Noting that the politics of a party does not just revolve around its manifesto, Bharadwaj said the support base and the emotional connection between the cadre and the top leadership also plays a crucial role in keeping an organisation together. Kejriwal, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money-laundering case linked to the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy, is in judicial custody till 15 April. —*PTI*

WILL MEET YOU SOON OUTSIDE: SISODIA IN LETTER

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

AAP leader Manish Sisodia has written a letter from Tihar Jail to the people of his assembly constituency, comparing his plight with the atrocities committed by the Britishers against freedom fighters and asserting his commitment to education.

The former deputy chief minister, who has been arrested in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case, also expressed hope that he will be out of jail soon. "Will meet you soon outside. The British rulers had also arrogance of power and they sent people to jail in false cases," he said and added that Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, who spent many years in jail, were his inspiration.

Sisodia's bail hearing is scheduled in a Delhi court on Saturday. In the letter to people of his assembly constituency Patparganj in east Delhi, Sisodia, said a struggle for good education and schools is underway like people fought for freedom of the country. "Education revolution Zindabad. Love you all," Sisodia, who also served as education minister in the Kejriwal government before his arrest, said in the letter.

Sisodia said his love for the people of his constituency has increased while being incarcerated and that they were his strength. —*PTI*

Assam Cong chief sues CM Himanta for ₹10cr

GUWAHATI, 5 APRIL

Assam Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah has filed a Rs 10 crore defamation suit against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at a local court here, claiming that various statements made by the BJP leader have damaged his public image and the party.

The case was filed by Borah in the court of civil judge (senior division) cum assistant sessions judge no 1, Kamrup Metro, on Thursday.

Besides Sarma, a leading vernacular daily of the state and its editor have been made respondents in the suit.

Borah has alleged that

PHOTO: PTI

Sarma's statements on numerous occasions, claiming that the Congress state chief will leave the party soon, has led to a dent in his public image and also harmed the party.

The Chief Minister has been claiming that Borah will join the BJP by early next year, which has been refuted by the opposition leader. —*PTI*

FRESH ROW

Bengal guv calls campuses 'mini-Sandeshkhali'

KOLKATA, 5 APRIL

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose on Friday claimed that university campuses in the state have become 'mini-Sandeshkhali', and ordered a judicial enquiry into the alleged violence, corruption and misuse of varsities for political purposes, a Raj Bhavan official said.

Bose, who is the chancellor of all state-run universities, will constitute a one-man commission headed by a retired Judge of the Supreme Court or High Court to look into the matter, he added.

"The governor has realised that all state-run university campuses have become mini-Sandeshkhali. Today, he ordered a judicial enquiry into corruption, violence and misuse of university campuses in West Bengal for electioneering and political purposes," the official said.

Allegations of sexual atrocities on women and land grabs were levelled against local leaders of the Trinamool Congress at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district recently. —*PTI*

Slugfest ensues in Kerala as blast kills 1, hurts 1

KANNUR, 5 APRIL

A blast that claimed the life of one person and seriously injured another near Panur in this north Kerala district on Friday stirred up political waters in the state with both the Congress and the BJP blaming the CPI(M) for it, while the Left party denied any involvement in the incident.

The opposition Congress alleged that the blast, which occurred around 1am according to the police, happened during the manufacturing of country-made bombs by some CPI(M) supporters.

The BJP accused the Left party of trying to create terror by using bombs.

The ruling CPI(M), meanwhile, denied the allegations and said that the two people involved in the incident were also accused of attacking workers of the Left party, and therefore they were no longer considered as part of the political organisation.

The CPI(M)'s Panoor area committee, in a statement, also said that while the Left party has been trying to maintain peace, its political opponents are deliberately spreading "propaganda" that the injured were party workers to mislead the people.

Sherin, a resident of Kaivelikkal, succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Kozhikode. The other injured person, Vineesh, lost one palm and is in critical condition, according to the police.

Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly VD Satheesan blamed the CPI(M) for the incident and alleged that the Left party was using its workers to manufacture country-made bombs and worsening the law-and-order situation during the elections.

Senior BJP leader and the party's Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar claimed that CPI(M) is taking refuge in terror as it is losing support among the people. —*PTI*

'REPRIVE' FOR MINORITIES

CAA does not exclude: VP Dhankar

DEHRADUN, 5 APRIL

Asserting that the CAA is a "reprieve" for persecuted religious minorities in neighbouring countries, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said India does not need any sermons from other countries on the issue.

Dhankhar also said there were "false narratives and misinformation" on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which was notified last month.

Addressing the 2023-batch IAS officer trainees at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie, Dhankhar said, "India does not need any sermons from anyone on this planet on the point of equality as we have always believed in it."

"Some countries are yet to have a woman president while we had a woman prime minister before even the UK had. Supreme Court in other countries completed 200 years without a woman judge but we have."

Dhankhar said there were 'false narratives and misinformation' on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) PHOTO: PTI

Dhankhar said the CAA neither seeks to deprive any Indian citizen of his or her citizenship, nor does it exclude anyone from applying for Indian citizenship as was the case earlier.

CAA facilitates acquisition of Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from the neighbouring countries, he said.

"How can this reprieve, healing touch to those persecuted in our neighbourhood on account of their religious commitment be discriminatory?" the vice president said.

"We have to neutralise these narratives. These emanate not out of ignorance, but out of a strategy to run down our nation," he said.

- Dhankhar called urged the youth to rebuff such "strategised orchestration of factually untenable anti-national narratives aimed at tainting and tarnishing our glorified and robust constitutional bodies

Dhankhar called urged the youth to rebuff such "strategised orchestration of factually untenable anti-national narratives aimed at tainting and tarnishing our glorified and robust constitutional bodies."The vice president said that governance has improved in recent years. "Democratic values and essence is deepening as equality before law is being enforced in exemplary manner," he said. —*PTI*

Assam cops seize ₹210 cr heroin in state's largest haul

GUWAHATI, 5 APRIL

In the biggest-ever drug haul in Assam, heroin worth Rs 210 crore was seized in Cachar district, police said. In a joint operation of the Special Task Force (STF) and Cachar Police, a vehicle from Mizoram was intercepted in Sayeedpur in Silchar police station area on Thursday, STF Inspector General Parthasarathi Mahanta said. "On searching the vehicle, more than 21.5 kg of heroin was seized from it, out of which 18 kg was in the purest form that needs further processing, while 3.5 kg was finished product," Mahanta said. The value of the seized drugs was estimated to be around Rs 210 crore in the international black market, he said. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma posted on X, "In a big step towards a #DrugsFreeAssam, 21 kg of heroin has been seized in Silchar in a joint operation by @STFAssam & @cacharpolice. One person has been arrested and an investigation is underway to crack the supply grid. Well done @assampolice!" *—PTI*

Woman delivers baby outside hospital; 3 docs suspended

JAIPUR, 5 APRIL

Rajasthan government has suspended three doctors of a government hospital for negligence after a pregnant woman was denied admission and had to deliver her child near the hospital's gate. Shubhra Singh, Additional Chief Secretary, Medical Education, said after the matter came to light, the department constituted an inquiry committee with immediate effect, according to an official vstatement. Taking action on the committee's report, three resident doctors of Kanwatia Hospital -- Kusum Saini, Neha Rajawat and Manoj -- were suspended on Thursday after "serious negligence and insensitivity" was found on their part. A show cause notice was also issued to Kanwatia Hospital Superintendent Dr Rajendra Singh Tanwar for supervisory negligence in the case, it added. The incident took place on Wednesday when the pregnant woman was not admitted to the hospital. *—PTI*

5 killed, 5 injured in road accident in Punjab's Faridkot

CHANDIGARH, 5 APRIL

Five people were killed and as many others were injured when their mini-truck collided with a trailer truck in Punjab's Faridkot district on Friday, police said. The accident occurred on Kotkapura-Moga road when a mini-truck carrying 10 passengers collided with a trailer truck, they said. Five people, including two women, died on the spot and the five people injured were taken to the hospital for treatment, police said. *—PTI*

First-ever Telugu TV news reader dies at 74

PHOTO: PTI

HYDERABAD, 5 APRIL

First-ever Telugu television news reader **Shanti Swarup**, who was a household name in undivided Andhra Pradesh during the 1980s, died here on Friday, Doordarshan sources said. He was 74. Swarup was admitted to a private hospital here two days ago with heart-related issues and the end came today, sources said. Swarup presented the news when the first Telugu news bulletin was broadcast on Doordarshan on November 14, 1983, they said. Since then, he worked in the channel till his retirement in 2011. In an age when the teleprompter was absent, Swarup used to present the news with aplomb by memorising the news. He had won praise for his modulation in presenting the news depending on the nature of the news story. *—PTI*

'Nation forgot Manipur': Traders question polls

Traders said after 11 months there has not been a resolution

IMPHAL, 5 APRIL

Amidst the lingering aftermath of ethnic conflicts, the women traders at Manipur's iconic 'Ima market' -- the only market in the world run entirely by women -- have expressed a deafening lack of enthusiasm towards upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Questioning the relevance of the electoral process amidst the ongoing turmoil, the women traders from various market associations, are contemplating a boycott of the polls with their major grievance being -- "the nation forgot Manipur". Nema Devi, a seasoned fish vendor at the market, reflects the sentiment shared by many, emphasising the absence of tangible change despite months of unrest.

"Even 11 months after the violence, there has not been a resolution and no restoration of peace. We continue to live by the rule of taking one day at a time. Living in continuous fear and going ahead with our usual lives. "What will change with the elections? The nation, the government, everybody forgot Manipur," 52-year-old Devi, who has been running the shop in the market for over a decade, told PTI.

Debjani, a fruits and vegetables vendor, succinctly said, "Elections nai chahiye" (elections not needed)", echoing the prevailing scepticism.

Traders at the world's only women-run market 'Ima Keithel' in violence-hit Manipur on Friday PHOTO: PTI

At first glance, the 500-year-old "Ima Keithel" is much like any other popular market. Lines of vendors selling everything from fresh fruit to fish and fabrics from dusk until dawn. The famous market was also the theme of the state's Republic Day tableau this year. Priya Kharaibam, a third-generation pottery trader, questioned the purpose of elections if the status quo remains unchanged.

"If everything has to go on the way it is going on, why do we need elections? What will change?" she asked. "The decision to hold the elections shows that the government has no concern for the life and property of the common people. The people of the state have been witnessing a cycle of violence arising out of conflict between two communities for the last 11 months.

"We have been facing immense hardship due to the protracted violence," said Yumnam Ibeyaima, General Secretary of the traders' body. The unfolding crisis stemming from clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki communities has claimed over 200 lives, with thousands displaced and living in camps.

The elections for two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur will be held in two phases on 19 and 26 April. While Inner Manipur and some segments of Outer Manipur will vote in the first phase on 19 April, the remaining segments of Outer Manipur will vote in Phase 2 on 26 April. *—PTI*

ELGAR PARISHAD-MAOIST CASE

Shoma Sen gets bail after 6 years

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

PHOTO: X/ SHOMA SEN

The Supreme Court on Friday granted bail to academic-activist Shoma Kanti Sen, who was arrested in June 2018 in connection with the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case.

A bench of Justices Aniruddha Bose and Augustine George Masih directed that she be released on bail on such conditions as the special court may consider fit and proper. It said the conditions shall include that Sen shall not leave the state of Maharashtra without the permission of the special court.

"The appellant (Sen) shall inform the investigation officer of National Investigation Agency (NIA) about the address where she shall reside during the period she remains enlarged on bail," the bench said while pronouncing the order. It said she shall use only one mobile phone number during the bail period and share it with the investigating officer.

"The appellant shall also ensure that the mobile remains active and charged round the clock so that she remains constantly accessible throughout the period she remains enlarged on bail," it said. "During this period, that is the period during which she remains on bail, the appellant shall keep the location status, that is GPS of her mobile phone, active 24 hours a day and her phone shall be paired with that of the investigating officer of NIA to enable him at any given time to identify the appellant's exact location," the bench said.

It directed that while on bail, Sen shall report to the station house officer of the police station, within whose jurisdiction she shall reside, once every fortnight. "In the event there is breach of any of these conditions or any other conditions that may be imposed by the special court independently, it would be open for the prosecution to seek cancellation of bail granted to the appellant before the special court...," the bench said.

Sen, an English literature professor, was arrested in connection with the case on 6 June, 2018. The case relates to alleged inflammatory speeches delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave held at Shaniwarwada in Pune on 31 December, 2017 which police claimed triggered violence the next day near the Koregaon-Bhima war memorial located on the city's outskirts. *—PTI*

Mukhtar Ansari death: SC issues notice to UP

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Friday sought a response from the Uttar Pradesh government on a plea by MLA Abbas Ansari, who is lodged in jail, seeking permission to attend fatiha or special prayers on April 10 following the death of his father Mukhtar Ansari.

Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari died of cardiac arrest at a hospital in Banda in Uttar Pradesh on 28 March. Abbas, who is in judicial custody in connection with a criminal case, had moved the apex court seeking permission to attend the last rites of his father.

On Friday, his counsel told a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sandeep Mehta that his plea could not be listed before the court on time and now the funeral is over. The lawyer said they be allowed to amend the petition and seek permission to attend fatiha which is scheduled on April 10.

He said they would file the amended petition during the day itself. *—PTI*

No ground for Kachchatheevu claims: Lanka

COLOMBO, 5 APRIL

The statements coming out of India on "reclaiming" Kachchatheevu Island from Sri Lanka have "no ground", Sri Lankan Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda said.

The senior Sri Lankan Tamil politician's comments came days after Narendra Modi government targeted Congress Party and its ally Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu accusing them of overlooking national interests in the ceding of Katchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka in 1974.

BJP has also been targeting the two parties for not ensuring the rights of the fishermen wanting to fish in waters around the Katchatheevu Island.

The statements on "reclaiming" Kachchatheevu from Sri Lanka's hold has "no ground," Devananda added.

Sri Lankan minister said according to 1974 agreement fishermen from both sides could fish in the territorial waters of both countries. But it was later reviewed and amended in 1976.

Accordingly, fishermen from both countries were banned from fishing in neighbouring waters.

The statements on "reclaiming" Kachchatheevu from Sri Lanka's hold has "no ground," Devananda has said. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

So far this year, at least 178 Indian fishermen and 23 trawlers have been arrested by Sri Lanka Navy.

On Thursday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) steered clear of the row surrounding Katchatheevu Island.

The local fishermen have led widespread protests to stop illegal fishing by their Indian counterparts in the Sri Lankan waters. They say the bottom trawling by the Indians is harmful to Sri Lankan fishing community interests.

To a volley of questions on the Katchatheevu issue, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal referred to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's recent comments on the matter. *—PTI*

SC puts on hold ban on UP Board of Madarsa Edu Act

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Friday imposed an interim stay on an order of the Allahabad High Court that declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud issued notices to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh government and others on the pleas against the high court order.

"The object and purpose of Madarsa board is regulatory in nature and the Allahabad HC is not prima facie correct that establishment of board will breach secularism," the bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

Representational Image PHOTO: PTI

The top court said HC has misconstrued provisions of the 2004 act as it does not provide for religious instruction and the purpose and character of the statute is regulatory in nature. The high court on 22 March declared the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004, "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism, and asked the state government to accommodate current students in the formal schooling system. The High Court had declared the law ultra vires on a writ petition filed by advocate Anshuman Singh Rathore. *—PTI*

Nepali tourist 'molested' by mob in Assam

JORHAT, 5 APRIL

A Nepali woman tourist has alleged that she was molested by a mob in Assam's Jorhat district for purportedly dressing in man's clothing.

The police have registered a case in this regard and initiated an investigation now. "Update regarding allegations of an assault on an individual from Nepal. A case has been registered in this regard," Assam Police posted on X on Thursday.

It added that the sub-divisional police officer of Titabor is in touch with the complainant and supervising further action as per the law. The allegations of molestation and police inaction were raised by the victim through a social media video earlier on Thursday. She claimed that she was picked on by a mob in Mariani area just because she was dressed like a boy. The group of six-seven people, including a woman and a local reporter, pulled her hair and tore away half of her T-shirt, the woman alleged—*PTI*

'HE WAS PAKISTANI'

SC junks plea to bring Sufi saint's remains from B'desh

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

- The lawyer told the top court that the saint was born in Prayagraj, then called Allahabad, and migrated to Pakistan

The Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea seeking transportation of the mortal remains of Sufi saint Hazrat Shah Muhammad Abdul Muqtadir Shah Masood Ahmad from Bangladesh to India.

A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said there is no constitutionally enforceable right to seek transportation of the Sufi saint's mortal remains as he was a Pakistani citizen.

"He is a Pakistani citizen, how can you expect the Union of India to bring his burials in India?" the bench asked. The counsel, appearing for petitioner Dargah Hazrat Mulla Syed, said the saint has no family in Pakistan, whereas, at the dargah in Uttar Pradesh, he was the Sajjada-nasheen (spiritual head).

The lawyer told the top court that the saint was born in Prayagraj, then called Allahabad, and migrated to Pakistan. He got Pakistani citizenship in 1992. "He was elected as the Sajjada Nasheen of the shrine viz. Dargah Hazrat Mulla Syed Mohammad Shah in 2008 in Prayagraj. He executed his will in 2021 expressing a desire to be buried in the shrine. He died in Dhaka where he was buried. There are difficulties in entertaining such a petition.

"As a matter of first principle, it would not be right for this court to direct the transportation of the mortal remains of a citizen of a foreign state in India," the bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said. *—PTI*

E-gaming 28% GST: SC takes over pleas

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Friday allowed a petition of the Centre and transferred to itself pleas, challenging the imposition of 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax on e-gaming firms, from nine high courts for an authoritative pronouncement. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra allowed the transfer plea of the Centre and asked it to file the response to the pending petitions of online gaming companies by 20 April. It also appointed a nodal counsel, who will collate records in the case and now the pleas will be taken up for hearing in the first week of May. Many online gaming firms like Dream 11, Games 24x7, and Head Digital Works had moved the top court challenging the GST imposition. Earlier, the top court had stayed the Karnataka High Court verdict quashing the GST intimation notice to the tune of Rs 21,000 crore issued to an online gaming firm. *—PTI*

'IT WAS INEVITABLE'

Prostate cancer cases to double by 2040: Lancet study

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Prostate cancer cases worldwide are projected to more than double and deaths are expected to increase by 85 per cent between 2020 and 2040, with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) likely to bear the "overwhelming brunt" of this spike, according to Lancet Commission on prostate cancer.

The surge in cases is "inevitable", with actual numbers likely to be much higher because of under-diagnosis and missed opportunities for data collection in LMICs, researchers said.

They said aging populations and improving life expectancy will lead to more cases of prostate cancer in older men, and given that being 50 years or older is a risk factor, lifestyle changes and public health interventions may not be able to prevent the upcoming surge.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- The surge in cases is "inevitable", with actual numbers likely to be much higher because of under-diagnosis and missed opportunities for data collection in LMICs, researchers said

The commission called for evidence-based interventions, including early detection and diagnosis, along with education and awareness programmes, to help save lives from prostate cancer in the coming years.

Similarly, there is a low general awareness that treatments available in LMICs can prolong survival and decrease suffering, including cheap, effective ones such as hormone therapy.

Acknowledging the "fear of suffering" that comes with a cancer diagnosis, Vas advocated for consulting with a pain specialist. The commission includes researchers from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), an inter-governmental agency forming part of the World Health Organisation.

Globally, the study estimated yearly cases of prostate cancer to be 14 lakh and yearly deaths due to the disease to stand at 3.75 lakh in 2020. The prostate cancer cases are projected to rise to 29 lakh a year and almost seven lakh prostate cancer deaths a year by 2040. *—PTI*

AIRSTRIKE TRAGEDY

Iranian mourners gather around a truck carrying the flag-draped coffins of Revolutionary Guard members killed in an airstrike widely attributed to Israel that destroyed Iran's Consulate in Syria on Monday. The public funeral coincided with Iran's annual rally Quds Day, a traditional show of support for the Palestinians that has been held on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Water crisis: Is B'lore's fate in store for M'lore and S'mogga?

The spectre of 'Day Zero' casts a dark shadow over Bengaluru, but the city's not alone in Karnataka — Mangaluru and Shivamogga (also known as Shimoga) also teeter on the brink of a water crisis and are being closely monitored by environmentalists and activists.

The lifeline for these cities lies in the monsoons, which traditionally provide temporary relief by replenishing water reserves. However, with the volume of monsoon rains dwindling and becoming increasingly erratic, this reliance has become precarious.

Though Shivamogga is also on the radar of expert studies regarding an impending water crisis, it may not become concerned about water for several years because it has a natural drain system that empties storm water into the rivers that run along the landlocked region, as opposed to the coastal region

However, the district has been experiencing a shortage since last year. In 2023, villagers in Shivamogga district began protesting against a multi-village water supply scheme, raising concerns about the project's potential impact on their lives as water was to be pumped from one point.

In November 2023, the minister-in-charge of the district stated that 238 villages in the district are expected to encounter drinking water problems in the future due to insufficient rains, but arrangements were being made to counter them. Shivamogga Zila Panchayat has been digging more borewells to alleviate the drinking water problem.

However, according to minor irrigation engineers, the groundwater levels are going down every year, primarily due to the over-exploitation of surface water for irrigating water-guzzling crops like areca nut and paddy.

Given that areca nut is a commercial crop, farmers are converting their paddy fields into areca plantations, which require large volumes of water year-round. In contrast, paddy cultivation uses water only during two seasons, each lasting around 45 days.

Reports stated that 283 districts will face water crisis due to insufficient rains ***PHOTO: X/ @TMIGRATIONSTORY***

Shivamogga city is rapidly expanding and emerging as a healthcare and education tourism hub, closely following Bengaluru and Mangaluru. The development of multi-storey buildings is outpacing that of Mangaluru.

With a travel time of just four hours to Bengaluru and Mangaluru, many new-generation industries are finding Shivamogga ideal for their ventures. The recent inauguration of Shivamogga Airport has further boosted the industrial sector.

"This will inevitably increase water consumption in the coming years; all our rivers rely on monsoon rains. In 2023, when the monsoon failed, the Tunga river, which supplies water to Shivamogga city, saw only 56 per cent of its usual output," stated Rekha Ranganath, a prominent civic leader in the Shivamogga City Corporation.

The pace of urban development, industrial growth, and real estate expansion in Mangaluru can be likened to that of Bengaluru, if not in scale, then certainly in speed. This surge has contributed to the rising demand for domestic water.

Mangaluru city relies solely on the Nethravati river as its water source, which is regulated by a dam located in Thumbay, approximately 22 kilometres from the city. Along the way, numerous towns and villages also depend on this reservoir for water.

Further, there is a worrying trend in the region that could exacerbate the water tensions. Over 1,600 acres of vital water bodies flanking National Highways 75 and 66 en route to the city have been encroached upon for construction purposes. This rampant filling of wetlands obstructs underground water channels, leading to a decline in groundwater levels over recent years.

All undulations of land that hold water are now flatlands, which has triggered topsoil erosion. Over 40 tonnes of topsoil erode every day during the monsoons in coastal urban areas. According to the top soil conservation cell of state government's department of minor irrigation, the eroded topsoil drains primarily into the river and later into the sea. This is why the rivers in the coastal areas become shallow during the non-monsoon periods, affecting the water quantity available for the cities and towns, pointed out experts in the department.

This concern is well reflected in the instances of encroachment upon the estuary and banks of the Gurupur River by builders and real estate developers. Violations have been observed in Chitrapur, along the left side of NH 66 between Kulur and Kottara at Baikampady and in Jeppinamogaru. Various sections of the river are being filled with soil, waste materials and other solid waste to reclaim land from the river.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS

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SALAR ساڵار

Efforts to reconnect elephant corridors must be well planned

Population fragmentation is the split of a large single population into smaller, isolated units, which increases the risk of extinction for endangered species due to population isolation. The Asian elephant is a flagship species; protecting its habitat and ensuring connectivity through corridors will help maintain a genetically viable population and conserve biodiversity. However, efforts to reconnect elephant corridors must be carefully planned.

Landscape ecology in the 1960s defined a corridor as an elongated stretch of land joining two reserves. The landscape was conceived as a patchwork of habitat "patches", usually reserves, within a "landscape matrix" used by humans. A corridor would help animals cross the matrix in a relatively safe manner to go from one protected area to the next. In the absence of better techniques, experts would rely on field knowledge and mark a typically long and narrow passage to be preserved or restored as a corridor.

This conception guided the "Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India" report (ROP) by the Wildlife Trust of India in 2005 and 2017. ROP has limitations, such as the lack of a working definition of corridor. The passages that are identified in the document as corridors are based on expert knowledge.

This older concept of corridor began to be questioned in the 1990s. A corridor seen or designed by humans may not hold true for animals, because their sensory world and physiological requirements are entirely different from ours and they decide their movement based on many variables unknown to us.

Moreover, expert identification of corridors is fraught with difficulties as experts know some parts better than others and thus do not have a synoptic view of larger landscapes, which leads to a bias. Humans may also overlook disruptions, such as a noise barrier that may deter animals from crossing and render the reconnection effort ineffective. Thus, there is no guarantee that a corridor proposed by an expert is the best possible choice or will even work at all.

From a scientific point of view, personal expertise does not allow the test of hypothesis. To verify variables that can predict the path a roaming elephant would take or the landscape features that would prevent elephants from staying within a corridor, one must put animal movement at the centre of investigations. This realisation influenced a new era in the early 2000s. Landscape ecology became more accurate and new frontiers of scientific exploration opened up to include aspects of animal behaviour, physiology and evolutionary biology.

The advancements in detecting core areas and corridors are now based on three factors: intensive use of field data; improvement in GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and availability of geospatial data; and adapted algorithms.

Field data helps collect essential knowledge on animal presence, movement records where they go and genetic profile indicates patterns of genetic exchange between sub populations. These can be used independently or together for better prediction of elephant movement. Animal presence is obtained from camera trapping or from georeferenced indices, movement paths by radio or satellite telemetry and genetic makeup is derived non-invasively from dung piles.

Parallel to the field data, environmental data are now easily obtained at the landscape scale in the form of rasters (such as elevation images) or vectors (such as road maps). Scientists try to gather as many candidate GIS layers as they deem valuable. With the raster or vector images, they can calculate a landscape distance among the same individuals. For example, with slope, they calculate the easiest path between two points, which is usually where the gradient is gentler. Genetic data, similarly, helps establish a genetic distance among individuals, which could be correlated with the landscape distance along least-cost paths (a path that costs the least to traverse in terms of time, distance or other variables).

The resistance map can be compared to a road map with speed limits: which road the vehicles choose depends on the road capacity and speed limit. The same way, animal movement is modelled on the resistance map through several algorithms known to specialists such as circuit theory, factorial least-cost paths or resistant kernel that connect the dots of animal locations and extrapolate it over the landscape. This analyses will provide the final document, the connectivity map.

Both ROP and the recent, more accurate Union environment ministry report are interesting efforts to identify corridors. But it is urgent to develop a national framework based on recent scientific methods that use movement data to secure habitat connectivity and conservation of a key species.

—Downtoearth

Population fragmentation increased the risk of extinction for endangered species ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

IPL: The unprecedented booing of Hardik Pandya

- The boos returned when Pandya couldn't latch on to a difficult catch and the only time the jeering turned to applause was when Pandya hit a few boundaries.

Hardik Pandya, captain of the Mumbai Indians team in Indian Premier League (IPL), the world's richest cricket tournament, has faced booing crowds during the team's games in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and even in home ground, Mumbai.

Traded from his earlier side Gujarat Titans, Pandya has replaced India's all format skipper Rohit Sharma at the Mumbai Indians for the 2024 IPL, which began on 23 March. The 30-year-old seam-bowling all-rounder had previously been part of four title-winning campaigns under Sharma's leadership at Mumbai Indians, spending his first seven IPL seasons there until 2021.

For many, the move from Mumbai came as a surprise. The franchise has a history of storied captains. Pandya's appointment marks Mumbai's fifth captain since its inception in 2008, succeeding the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Ricky Ponting, and Rohit Sharma.

However, Mumbai fans have not taken to it lightly. They believe Sharma - the competition's joint-most successful captain, alongside MS Dhoni - didn't give up the captaincy and was displaced. And they are letting Pandya know how they feel.

The Mumbai captain encountered a hostile reception from fans last week in Ahmedabad when facing his former team, Gujarat Titans, whom he lead to successive IPL finals, including the 2022 title. The booing continued as Mumbai faced Sunrisers Hyderabad in the southern city of Hyderabad. At Mumbai's home game against Rajasthan Royals (RR) at Wankhede Stadium on Monday night, Pandya faced jeers from fans during the toss, prompting commentator Sanjay Manjrekar to ask the crowds to "behave".

That didn't quite placate the crowd though. The boos returned when Pandya couldn't latch on to a difficult catch and the only time the jeering turned to applause was when Pandya hit a few boundaries. It didn't help that Royals won the game, handing down Mumbai's third back-to-back defeat.

Ravichandran Ashwin, the spin maestro who plays for Rajasthan Royals, has chastised crowds for their behaviour and blamed India's "fan wars" for the booing that Pandya has been subjected to.

Pandya's appointment marks Mumbai's fifth captain since 2008 ***PHOTO: X/ @SPORTYVISHAL***

"People should remember which country these players represent. It's our country. Fan wars should never take such an ugly route," he said on his YouTube channel.

Ashwin cited instances from the past where Indian cricket legends such as Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, and Rahul Dravid played under each other's captaincies without any significant fan backlash.

"Sourav Ganguly played under Sachin Tendulkar and vice versa. These two have both played under Rahul Dravid. These three have played under Anil Kumble and all of them have played under MS Dhoni. When they were under Dhoni, these players were cricket jambhavans (giants). Dhoni too played under Virat Kohli."

Ashwin also asked whether such "fan wars" happen in any other cricket playing nation. "Have you seen, for instance, Joe Root and Zak Crawley fans have a fight? Or Joe Root and Jos Buttler fans fight? It's crazy. Do you see Steven Smith fans fighting with Pat Cummins fans in Australia?".

Rajasthan Royals' pace bowler Trent Boult has also backed Pandya, a former teammate, and asked him to "block out white noise".

"It is something you cannot control, as professional sportspeople it is what you are exposed to in a way. You have to block out the white noise and focus on the job, (but) it is easier said than done," the New Zealand pace bowler told the media.

On social media platforms such as Reddit and X, fans are asserting their freedom of expression, saying that cricketers are overly sensitive. They argue that if players embrace adoration, they must also endure criticism, including boos.

Sports writer Sharda Ugra said the booing of Pandya was quite unprecedented.

"You've had players booed by the crowds at various stands, but in this sustained manner… from one ground to another ground and to a third ground which is his home ground… It's quite unusual," says Ugra, who has been writing on cricket since 1989.

"I think it's a lot generated by social media. It's almost like a trend that carries on at every Mumbai Indians game," she adds.

Many believe Mumbai and Pandya exacerbated the situation by offering no clarity when questioned about the change in captaincy.

During a pre-season press conference broadcast live on YouTube, Pandya was queried about a potential "captaincy clause" in his contract following his move from Gujarat to Mumbai. He maintained a stoic silence, leaving the moderator no option but to swiftly move to the next question.

Similarly, when reporters pressed head coach Mark Boucher to reason behind the franchise's decision to appoint Pandya as captain over Sharma this season, Boucher opted for silence as well.

Only time will tell whether the fans warm up to Pandya and accept him fully. Undoubtedly, if he begins to perform well and guides his team to wins, the jeers are likely to make way for applause.

—BBC News

Israel using AI to bomb targets in Gaza

AI-based tool is called 'Lavender' and is known to have a 10 per cent error rate

TEL AVIV, 5 APRIL

Amid the war against Hamas in Gaza, the Israel military has been using artificial intelligence to help identify bombing targets in the war-torn regions, CNN reported citing an investigation by +972 Magazine and a local call with inputs from six Israeli intelligence officials involved in the alleged programme.

The Israeli officials, quoted in an extensive investigation by the online publication jointly run by Palestinians and Israelis, said that the AI-based tool was called "Lavender" and was known to have a 10 per cent error rate.

When asked about +972 Magazine's report, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) did not dispute the existence of the tool but denied AI was being used to identify suspected terrorists. But in a lengthy statement it emphasized that "information systems are merely tools for analysts in the target identification process," and that Israel tries to "reduce harm to civilians to the extent feasible in the operational circumstances ruling at the time of the strike."

CNN also quoted the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and said "analysts must conduct independent examinations, in which they verify that the identified targets meet the relevant definitions in accordance with international law and additional restrictions stipulated in the IDF directives."

However, one official told +972 "that human personnel often served only as a "rubber stamp" for the machine's decisions" and typically devoted only around 20 seconds to each target - ensuring they are male - before authorizing a bombing.

The investigation comes amid intensifying international scrutiny of Israel's military campaign after targeted air strikes killed several foreign aid workers delivering food in the Palestinian enclave. The Israeli military "does not use an artificial intelligence system that identifies terrorist operatives or tries to predict whether a person is a terrorist," the IDF statement on Wednesday said. But its analysts use a "database whose purpose is to cross-reference intelligence sources, in order to produce up-to-date layers of information on the military operatives of terrorist organizations." —*ANI*

Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike in the central Gaza Strip **PHOTO: PTI**

- The investigation comes amid intensifying international scrutiny of Israel's military campaign after targeted air strikes killed several foreign aid workers delivering food in the Palestinian enclave

PHOTO: ANI

US blocks dozen ships connected to Iran's military

WASHINGTON, DC, 5 APRIL

The United States on Thursday designated one entity and identified 13 associated vessels as blocked property for facilitating illicit trade in support of Iran's military, according to a statement by the US State Department. The US is also updating one vessel name on the Specially Designated National (SDN) and Blocked Persons list. "The United States is today designating one entity and identifying 13 associated vessels as blocked property, as well as updating one vessel name on the SDN List, for facilitating illicit trade in support of Iran's Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) and Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL)," the US state department said in the official statement. —*ANI*

US man executed for killing Indian national in 2002

HOUSTON, 5 APRIL

A 41-year-old man convicted of shooting and killing two people, including an Indian, in the US state of Oklahoma in 2002 has been executed, the state's first execution of the year. Michael Dewayne Smith was executed on Thursday by lethal injection at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary in McAlester town, Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond said in a statement. Smith had been on death row for the murders of 24-year-old Indian store clerk Sharath Pulluru and 40-year-old Janet Moore in separate incidents on 22 February, 2002. Oklahoma Attorney General released a statement after Smith was declared dead, saying: "I am grateful that justice has been served." He added that the two were murdered because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. —*PTI*

22 forced disappearances in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, 5 APRIL

For the past twenty years, Balochistan has grappled with the ongoing issue of enforced disappearances, casting a long and somber shadow over the region. Recent data released on Friday by Balochistan Post underscores the severity of the situation, revealing that 22 individuals have been victims of forced disappearances, while 15 forcibly disappeared individuals were released. Furthermore, 3 dead bodies of the 'missing' individuals were discovered. Baloch nationalists, activists, and human rights organisations have consistently accused Pakistani intelligence agencies and security forces of involvement in these abductions and unlawful killings, as per The Balochistan Post. —*ANI*

Amnesty's no to plans expelling Afghan migrants

KABUL, 5 APRIL

Amnesty International has called for an 'immediate cancellation' of a plan to expel the Afghan migrants from Pakistan, and stated that it violates international human rights laws, reported TOLOnews. The plan of expulsion of Afghan refugees, according to a statement made by one of the organization's activists for refugees and migrants, breaches international human rights laws, international refugee laws, and all international conventions. "Pakistan authorities' disregard for the persecution, and humanitarian catastrophe that await Afghan refugees if deported to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan is heart-breaking. Instead of heeding repeated global calls to halt deportations, the newly elected Pakistani government has disappointingly now extended the deportation drive to Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders as well," said James Jennion, according to TOLOnews. —*ANI*

Israel will reopen border with northern Gaza

JERUSALEM, 5 APRIL

Israel on Friday said it is taking steps to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, including reopening a key border crossing into hard-hit northern Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced the plans, just hours after the United States (US) President Joe Biden told him that future US support for the war in Gaza depends on Israel taking more action to protect civilians and aid workers. The announcement did not elaborate on quantities or types of items to be let in.

Still, despite their differences, the Biden administration has continued to provide Israel crucial military aid and diplomatic support for Israel's six-month war against Hamas. Israel faces growing international isolation after its forces killed seven aid workers helping deliver food in Gaza.

The Palestinian death toll soared above 33,000 people on Thursday, with another 75,600 wounded, Gaza's Health Ministry said. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tally, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

The United Nations (UN) says much of the population in northern Gaza is on the brink of starvation. UN court has concluded there is a "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza - a charge Israel strongly denies - and the UN Security Council has issued a legally binding demand for a cease-fire. —*ANI*

Halt weapons shipments to Israel, says UN

GENEVA, 5 APRIL

UN's top human rights body called on countries to stop selling or shipping weapons to Israel in a resolution passed on Friday that aims to help prevent rights violations against Palestinians amid Israel's blistering military campaign in Gaza.

The 47-member-country Human Rights Council voted 28-6 in favour of the resolution, with 13 abstentions.

Western countries were divided, with the US, Germany and others opposing the resolution, several abstaining and some European countries voting in favour.

The council has approved far more resolutions against Israel. —*PTI*

McDonald's to buy back restaurants after boycotts

CHICAGO, 5 APRIL

McDonald's will buy back all of its Israeli restaurants following a boycott of the brand after it was criticised for giving away thousands of free meals to Israeli soldiers. It said it had reached an agreement with franchisee Alonyal for the return of 225 outlets across the country employing 5,000 people. It had admitted that the conflict had "meaningfully impacted" its business. Protests affected sales in the Middle East, Indonesia and France. The boycott was sparked after countries such as Kuwait and Pakistan distanced themselves from the firm. —*BBC News*

CHAOS IN PAKISTAN

No evidence of Bushra Bibi being poisoned, says physician

Bushra Bibi and Imran Khan were sentenced to 14 years in jail in the Toshakhana corruption case **PHOTO: X/@TALATKVIEWS**

ISLAMABAD, 5 APRIL

Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi has not been given any poisonous substance, her personal physician has said following a medical checkup after allegations by the ex-prime minister that the former first lady was poisoned while incarcerated at his private residence which was turned into a sub-jail.

On 2 April, Khan during the hearing of the 190 million pound Toshakhana corruption case in Adiala jail informed Judge Nasir Javed Rana that there had been an attempt to poison the former first lady and added that she had marks on her skin and tongue as a side effect of the "poisoning".

He said that if any harm came to 49-year-old Bushra, the Pakistan Army Chief (Gen Asim Munir) should be held responsible as members of an intelligence agency were controlling everything at his Bani Gala residence in Islamabad and Adiala jail in Rawalpindi.

"At this time, there is no evidence of Bushra Bibi being poisoned," Dr Asim Yousuf said while speaking to Geo News.

Earlier in January, Khan and Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 14 years in jail in the Toshakhana corruption case.

—*PTI*

PTI to protest against poll 'rigging'

ISLAMABAD, 5 APRIL

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced it will stage a nationwide protest movement and will hold a series of rallies across the country against alleged rigging in the Pakistan general elections held on 8 February, The News International reported on Thursday.

Announcing a nationwide protest movement against alleged rigging in general elections 2024, PTI has announced staging a series of rallies across the country starting from Balochistan after Eid ul Fitr. —*ANI*

Pak assures security for Chinese citizens

ISLAMABAD, 5 APRIL

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari reassured Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong on Thursday of Pakistan's commitment to taking necessary measures to ensure the security of Chinese nationals engaged in projects within the country, Dawn reported.

The meeting comes a week after five Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were killed in a suicide bombing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bisham while travelling between Islamabad and a hydroelectric dam construction site in Dasu. The bus was attacked in the Bisham city of KP's Shangla district.

China demanded a probe into the blast and security for its citizens. In response, Islamabad announced a swift probe to hold the "perpetrators and accomplices" accountable. —*ANI*

After 6 months of war, Israel's isolation grows

JERUSALEM, 5 APRIL

When Israel declared war against Hamas last October, it stood unified at home and enjoyed broad backing from around the world following an unprecedented attack by the Islamic militant group.

Six months later, Israel finds itself in a far different place: bogged down in Gaza, divided domestically, isolated internationally and increasingly at odds with its closest ally. The risk of a broader regional war remains real.

Despite Israel's fierce military onslaught, Hamas is still standing, if significantly weakened. The offensive has pushed Gaza into a humanitarian crisis, displacing more than 80 per cent of the population and leaving over 1 million people on the brink of starvation. Yet Israel hasn't presented a postwar vision acceptable to its partners, and cease-fire talks remain at a standstill.

Israel declared war in response to Hamas' 7 October cross-border attack, in which the militant group killed 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and kidnapped about 250 others. Netanyahu has repeatedly vowed to invade Rafah, but he faces broad international opposition, including from the United States, because of the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians sheltering there. His popularity has plummeted since the outbreak of the war, with many holding him responsible for the intelligence and security failures that allowed the 7 October attack to occur. —*PTI*

Netanyahu's popularity has plummeted since the outbreak of the war, with many holding him responsible for the security failure **PHOTO: PTI**

Ukraine fires more than 50 drones against Russia

KYIV, 5 APRIL

Ukraine fired more than 40 drones into Russia's bordering Rostov region, Moscow defense officials said on Friday, in what appeared to be one of its biggest air attacks in the war and as Kyiv's forces step up their assaults on Russian soil.

Russia's Defense Ministry said a total of 44 drones were "intercepted and destroyed" in the Morozovsky district, more than 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the border.

The attack damaged a power substation, Rostov Gov. Vasily Golubev said.

The Russian defense ministry said nine more drones were intercepted over Russia's border regions of Kursk, Belgorod, Krasnodar and the nearby Saratov region.

On the 1,000-kilometre front line, where fighting is largely bogged down, low-cost drones are used by both sides to knock out expensive military hardware.

The Kremlin's forces have used large numbers of Iranian-designed Shahed drones to bombard urban areas of Ukraine. Kyiv, in turn, has developed small but fast-growing defense industry where drones, including deadly unmanned sea vessels, are proving effective. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@THEBLAZE

Hindu Temple in Texas sued for branding child

HOUSTON, 5 APRIL

An Indian-origin man whose 11-year-old son was branded with a hot iron rod as part of a religious ceremony in 2023 has sued a Hindu temple in the US state of Texas and its parent company seeking more than USD 1 million in damages.

Vijay Cheruvu, a Fort Bend County resident, said his son was branded with a hot iron rod during a religious ceremony at the Sri Ashtalakshmi Hindu temple in Sugarland, Texas in August last year.

According to a lawsuit filed this week in Fort Bend County, the boy suffered extreme pain and permanent disfigurement.

Cheruvu is seeking more than USD 1 million in damages in the lawsuit against the temple and its parent organisation, Jeeyar Educational Trust (JET) USA, Inc.

"I was shocked. I didn't know how to handle it. My primary concern is for my son's well-being," Cheruvu said at a press conference here.

He said his son was branded in two spots on his shoulder in the shape of a Hindu god, Vishnu. The lawsuit claims that over 100 people participated in the ceremony at the Ashtalakshmi Temple off Synott Road in Sugar Land in August. Three of those participants were children, including Cheruvu's son. The child was not identified, but attorneys read an impact statement from the boy. —*PTI*

Mass graves being found after 30 years in Rwanda

HUYE, 5 APRIL

As Rwanda prepares to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the genocide next week, continuing discoveries of mass graves are a stark reminder not only of the country's determination to reconcile with its grim past but also of the challenges it faces in aiming for lasting peace.

Rwanda has made it a criminal offense to withhold information about a previously unknown mass grave. For years perpetrators of the 1994 genocide, including those who served prison terms and were later released, have been urged to speak up and say what they know.

The October discovery led to the arrest of Jean Baptiste Hishamunda, 87, and four of his relatives.

After the remains of six people were discovered under his home, diggers started going through his entire property, finding dozens and then hundreds more remains as their search extended to other sites in Huye.

An estimated 800,000 Tutsi were killed by extremist Hutu in massacres that lasted over 100 days in 1994. Some moderate Hutu who tried to protect members of the Tutsi minority also were targeted.

The genocide was ignited on 6 April when a plane carrying President Juvénal Habyarimana, a member of the majority Hutu, was shot down in the capital Kigali.

The Tutsi were blamed for downing the plane and killing the president. Enraged, gangs of Hutu extremists began killing Tutsi, backed by the army and police.

The government of President Paul Kagame, whose rebel group stopped the genocide and whose party has ruled the East African country since 1994, has tried to bridge ethnic divisions.

—*PTI*

ALARM BELLS RING

'100 times worse' than COVID pandemic: Experts on bird flu

NEW YORK, 5 APRIL

The bird flu pandemic with the potential to be "100 times worse than COVID" may be on the horizon after a rare human case was discovered in Texas, experts have warned, the New York Post reported on Thursday.

The H5N1 avian flu has spread rapidly since a new strain was detected in 2020 affecting wild birds in every state, as well as in commercial poultry and backyard flocks.

But the recent cases detected in mammals, with cattle herds across four states becoming infected and on Monday, federal health officials announced that a dairy worker in Texas caught the virus.

"This virus (has been) on the top of the pandemic list for many, many years and probably decades," Suresh Kuchipudi, a bird flu researcher from Pittsburgh, said at a recent panel discussing the issue, the New York Post reported citing the Daily Mail.

For comparison, COVID currently kills less than 0.1 per cent of those it infects -- though at the start of the pandemic, the fatality rate was around 20 per cent. Symptoms of the bird flu are similar to those of other flus, including cough, body aches and fever, the New York Post reported.

—*ANI*

COVID kills less than 0.1 per cent of those it infects **PHOTO: ANI**

Rupee rises 9 paise to close at 83.30 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

The rupee appreciated 9 paise to close at 83.30 (provisional) against the US dollar as the Reserve Bank of India on Friday kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the seventh time in a row. However, a strong US dollar against major rivals overseas and elevated crude oil prices capped sharp gains for the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.44 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.26 and a low of 83.45. The local unit finally settled at 83.30 (provisional) against the dollar, 9 paise higher from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee recovered 14 paise to close at 83.39 against the US dollar. The rupee gained as the RBI's monetary policy remained the focus. *—PTI*

Gold jumps ₹850 to hit all-time high of Rs70K per 10g

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Gold prices surged by Rs 850 to reach a new peak of Rs 70,050 per 10 grams on Thursday on strong global cues, according to HDFC Securities. This is the second straight session that precious metal prices have hit all-time high levels. In the previous trade, the precious metal had settled at Rs 69,200 per 10 grams. Silver prices also zoomed Rs 1,000 to hit record Rs 81,700 per kg. In the previous session, it had finished at Rs 80,700 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 70,050 per 10 grams, up by Rs 850, amid a bullish trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,297 per ounce, up by USD 22 from the previous close. Gold touched yet another record after Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell confirmed that an interest rate cut would likely be appropriate "at some point this year". *—PTI*

Teerth Gopicon ₹44.4 cr IPO to open on 8 April

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Teerth Gopicon Ltd, an engineering construction and development company, on Friday fixed the issue price at Rs 111 per share for its initial public offering which will hit the capital market on 8 April. The Ahmedabad-based company, which mainly focuses on roads, sewerage and water distribution projects, looks to raise up to Rs 44.40 crore from the SME public issue, the company said in a statement.The initial share sale will open for subscription on Monday and close on 10 April, it added. The shares of the company will be listed on NSE's SME platform Emerge. The initial public offering comprises a fresh issue of 39.99 lakh equity shares of face value of Rs 10 each. It is a fixed-price issue. *—PTI*

India's exports register healthy growth in 2023

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Indian exporters made further inroads in European and Latin American nations in 2023, registering healthy growth in countries such as Romania, Montenegro, Austria, and Guatemala, an official said on Friday.India's merchandise export rose 2.1 per cent to the European Union (EU) in 2023 despite headwinds being faced by large developed markets like the EU and the UK due to high cost of living, weak external demand, and monetary tightening, the commerce ministry official said. "India's export trade expansion has been impressive inspite of global challenges in 2023," the official said. India's merchandise exports have recorded healthy growth in European nations like Romania, Czech Republic, Montenegro, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Luxemburg, Iceland, Ireland, and Austria. *—PTI*

You can soon deposit cash in banks using UPI: RBI

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

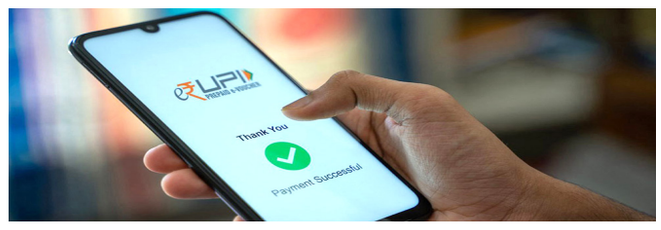
In a major decision, the Reserve Bank on Friday said it will soon facilitate cash deposit facility in banks through use of the popular UPI, an instant real-time payment system for inter-bank transactions through mobile phones.The central bank also decided to permit linking of Prepaid Payment Instruments (PPIs) through third-party Unified Payments Interface (UPI) applications.

Announcing the first bi-monthly monetary policy of the current financial year, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said that cash deposit machines (CDMs) deployed by banks enhance customer convenience while reducing cash-handling load on bank branches.

The facility of cash deposit is presently available only through use of debit cards.

"Given the popularity and acceptance of UPI, as also the benefits seen from the availability of UPI for card-less cash withdrawal at ATMs, it is now proposed to facilitate cash deposit facility through use of UPI," Das said. Operational instructions will be issued shortly, the RBI said.

The RBI has also proposed to permit linking of PPIs through third-party UPI applications to provide more flexibility to users. At present, UPI payments from bank accounts can be made by linking a bank account through the UPI app of the bank or using any third-party UPI application. However, the same facility is not available for PPIs. *—PTI*



The facility of cash deposit is presently available only through use of debit cards *PHOTO: PTI*

RBI retains GDP growth at 7 pc for FY25

The headwinds from geopolitical tensions are increasing disruptions in trade routes

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday retained the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth projection at 7 per cent for 2024-25 fiscal on the back of expectations of a normal monsoon, moderating inflationary pressures, and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector. The headwinds from protracted geopolitical tensions and increasing disruptions in trade routes, however, pose risks to the outlook, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said while unveiling the first bi-monthly monetary policy of the current fiscal.

Going forward, he said the outlook for agriculture and rural activity appears bright, with good rabi wheat crop and improved prospects of kharif crops, due to expected normal south-west monsoon.

"Strengthening of rural demand, improving employment conditions and informal sector activity, moderating inflationary pressures and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector should boost private consumption," Das said.

He further said the prospects of investment activity remain bright owing to upturn in the private capex cycle becoming steadily broad-based; persisting and robust government capital expenditure; healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates; rising capacity utilisation; and strengthening business optimism as reflected in RBI's surveys.

"Taking all these factors into consideration, real GDP growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7.0 per cent with Q1 at 7.1 per cent; Q2 at 6.9 per cent; Q3 at 7.0 per cent; and Q4 at 7.0 per cent," the RBI said, adding the risks are evenly balanced.

The governor said that with rural demand catching up, consumption is expected to support economic growth in 2024-25. Also, urban consumption stayed buoyant as evident from various indicators.

Das informed that the total flow of resources to the commercial sector from banks and other sources at Rs 31.2 lakh crore during 2023-24 is significantly higher than that of last year (Rs 26.4 lakh crore). External demand improved in February with exports registering double-digit expansion. Trade deficit, however, widened in February as imports also accelerated. *—PTI*

Shaktikanta Das *PHOTO: PTI*

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday retained the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth projection at 7 per cent for 2024-25 fiscal on the back of expectations of a normal monsoon, moderating inflationary pressures, and sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector.

RBI RETAINS INFLATION FORECAST AT 4.5 PC FOR FY25

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

The Reserve Bank on Friday retained inflation projection at 4.5 per cent for the current financial year, lower than 5.4 per cent in the last fiscal.

Assuming a normal monsoon this year, CPI (consumer price index-based) inflation for the current year is projected at 4.5 per cent, with Q1 at 4.9 per cent, Q2 at 3.8 per cent, Q3 at 4.6 per cent, and Q4 at 4.5 per cent. Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das also stressed on the need to remain vigilant on food prices, given the forecast of higher temperatures between April-June. He also said that the impact of reduction in fuel prices on inflation will deepen in the coming months.

Das, however, said the elephant (inflation) seems to have gone for a walk and RBI wants it to remain in the forest. The central government has tasked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ensure that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation remains at 4 per cent, with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. The retail inflation was 5.1 per cent in February. March inflation print is scheduled to be released next week.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Friday kept benchmark policy interest rates unchanged for the seventh time in a row. *—PTI*

inflation is seen going down below the 4 per cent mark in a few quarters of FY25 *PHOTO: PTI*

'Need to watch veggie prices this summer amid inflation'

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday said "we need to watch for movements in vegetable prices in this year's summer", which the Met office has predicted to be warmer.

Speaking to reporters after the rate-setting panel voted in favour of the seventh consecutive status quo in rates, Das said the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) key objective is to get the inflation rate to the 4 per cent target set for it by the government on a durable basis, and the "last mile" is the most challenging.

He, however, sounded more confident on wheat, saying much of the harvesting is by and large over.

"Wheat... there is not so much worry, but vegetable prices have to be watched... and any other impact that the heat wave conditions may produce," he said.

Deputy Governor Michael Patra said food inflation has been highly volatile in the recent past, and while actors pushing it up keep changing constantly, the efforts are focused on ensuring that this does not spill over into the rest of the consumer price inflation (CPI).

Stating that inflation pressures are emanating from items such as egg, meat, and fish, and also rice, Patra said in the recent past there have been short-term episodes where cereals, vegetables have led to a spike in food inflation.

Asked about the timeline, he said inflation is seen going down below the 4 per cent mark in a few quarters of FY25 but will be going back up.

Meanwhile, Das said the potential growth rate has gone up since the last study by the RBI, and added that the average growth for fiscal years 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 comes at 8 per cent. *—PTI*

8PC GROWTH PROJECTION FOR INDIA NOT OURS: IMF

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

The recent remarks of Krishnamurthy Subramanian, Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund, about India's growth figures does not represent the views of the IMF and were in his role as India's representative at the global body, the IMF has said.

"The views conveyed ...by Subramanian were in his role as India's representative at the IMF," Julie Kozack, IMF spokesperson, told reporters here on Thursday. She was responding to a question on recent remarks by Subramanian, in which he projected a growth rate of 8 per cent for India, which is different from the last growth rate projections by the IMF.

Subramanian, at a event in New Delhi on 28 March, had said Indian economy could grow at 8 per cent till 2047, if the country redoubles the good policies that it has implemented over the last 10 years and accelerate reforms.

The IMF spokesperson clarified, "We do have an Executive Board. That Executive Board is made up of executive directors who are representatives of countries or groups of countries, and they make up the Executive Board of the IMF. And that's distinct, of course, from the work of the IMF staff." *—PTI*

Markets fall amid RBI policy announcement

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty retreated from their record peaks and traded lower in early trade on Friday as investors turned cautious ahead of RBI's interest rate decision, amid muted global trends and higher crude oil prices.

The six-member rate-setting panel, which began its deliberation on Wednesday, will announce the decision on Friday.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 196.49 points or 0.25 per cent to 74,031.14. The broader NSE Nifty also declined 72.85 points or 0.32 per cent to 22,441.80. Among the Sensex constituents, 24 stocks were trading in red with Tech Mahindra, JSW Steel, L&T, Tata Steel, and Axis Bank being the major laggards.

Wipro, Bajaj Finance, TCS, and Tata Motors also saw heavy selling.

However, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finserve, Nestle India and Mahindra & Mahindra defied the trend and were trading with gains.

On the 50-share barometer NSE Nifty, as many as 38 shares were in the negative zone while 12 were in the green.VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said the Middle East skirmishes have pushed up Brent crude to USD 91 and if oil continues to rise that can pose macro headwinds for India.

"It is possible that the exuberant Indian investors Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) flush with money may ignore the headwinds buy the dips imparting resilience to the market," he said, adding, "amidst market weakness, banking stocks provide opportunities to buy."

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.35 per cent to USD 90.97 a barrel. Asian markets were trading lower with Japan's Nikkei 225 losing 2.42 per cent and Hang Seng of Hong Kong declining 0.69 per cent. South Koran index Kospi was also trading 0.89 per cent lower.European markets ended Thursday's session on a mixed note. Germany's DAX and London's FTSE 100 gained while CAC40 of France lost. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

MANDAVIYA STATES

India to stop importing urea by 2025 end

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

India will by the end of 2025 stop importing urea as a massive push for domestic manufacturing has helped bridge the gap between supply and demand, Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has said.

In an interaction with PTI, the minister noted that the availability of fertilisers is very important for Indian agriculture.

He said the country has been using chemical fertilisers for the last 60-65 years to enhance crop production.

Now, Mandaviya said, the government is making efforts to promote alternate fertilisers like nano liquid urea and nano liquid di-ammonium phosphate (DAP).

"Use of alternate fertilisers is good for crops and soil health. We are promoting it," he said.

Asked about achieving self-sufficiency in urea production, Mandaviya said the Modi government has adopted a two-pronged strategy to end dependency on urea imports.

The minister highlighted that the government has revived four closed urea plants and is reviving one another factory.

He noted that India needs around 350 lakh tonnes of urea annually to meet domestic demand.

Mandaviya said the annual domestic production capacity of urea would reach around 325 lakh tonnes after the commissioning of the fifth plant and the target is to replace the use of 20-25 lakh tonne of conventional urea with nano liquid urea.

According to the government data, imports of urea fell to 75.8 lakh tonne in 2022-23 from 91.36 lakh tonne in the previous year.

Urea imports stood at 98.28 lakh tonne in 2020-21, 91.23 lakh tonne in 2019-20 and 74.81 lakh tonne in 2018-19.

He said the Centre also protected Indian farmers from a sharp rise in prices of fertilisers in global markets by increasing the subsidy on key crop nutrients.

For 2024-25, the government has allocated a fertiliser subsidy of Rs 1.64 lakh crore as against the revised estimates of Rs 1.89 lakh crore for the 2023-24 fiscal.In 2022-23, the fertiliser subsidy had shot up to Rs 2.55 lakh crore. *—PTI*

Mandaviya *PHOTO: PTI*

ALL TIME HIGH

India's forex kitty jumps to USD 645.5 B

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

India's foreign exchange reserves increased USD 2.951 billion to USD 645.583 billion for the week ended March 29, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. This is the sixth consecutive week of a jump in overall reserves.

The kitty had increased USD 140 million to USD 642.631 billion in the previous reporting week.

The country's forex kitty had in September 2021 reached an all-time high of USD 642.453 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.

For the week ended March 29, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased USD 2.354 billion to USD 570.618 billion, data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves increased USD 673 million to USD 52.16 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down USD 73 million to USD 18.145 billion, the apex bank said. India's reserve position with the IMF was also down USD 2 million to USD 4.66 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. *—PTI*

India's foreign exchange reserves increased USD 2.951 billion to USD 645.583 billion for the week that ended 29 March, the Reserve Bank of India said on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Paytm parent firm approves grant of 91,250 stock options

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Paytm parent company One97 Communications on Friday announced approval of grant of 91,250 stock options under ESOP 2019. The Nomination and Remuneration Committee of the company's board has also approved allotment of fully paid-up 2,91,388 equity shares having face value of Rs 1 each to eligible employees under ESOP 2008 and 2019, as per a stock exchange filing. It said each stock option (of 91,250 stock under ESOP 2019) is convertible into one fully paid up equity share having face value of Rs 1 each. The exercise price per stock option is Rs 9.

The company further said that out of the total equity shares allotted to eligible employees, 2,86,997 equity shares were under One 97 Employees Stock Option Scheme 2019 (ESOP 2019) and 4,391 equity shares under ESOP 2008.

These were issued on April 4, 2024, according to the filing. After the allotment, the equity shares capital of the company has increased to over Rs 63.57 crore. *—PTI*

The company's board has also approved allotment of fully paid-up 2,91,388 equity *PHOTO: PTI*

Candidates: Pragu-Firouza, Vidit-Gukesh all end in draw

Seven of the eight opening matches ended in a draw

TORONTO, 5 APRIL

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa overcame some tense moments before settling for a draw against France's Firouza Alireza while D Gukesh could do little against compatriot Vidit Gujrathi and shared the spoils in the first round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

It was a quiet start as all four games in the men's section ended in draws while in the women's event Zhongyi Tan drew the first blood at the expense of compatriot Tingjie Lei with the remaining three games ending in draws. India's R Vaishali played out a draw against countrymate Koneru Humpy, Russians Aleksandra Goryachkina and Kateryna Lagno signed peace while the lowest ranked and only non-Grandmaster Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria had a good start holding Anna Muzychuk to a draw.

In the men's section the all-American battle between Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura also ended in a draw while Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan started off with an easy draw as white against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia.

The opening surprises hold a key point in everyone's preparation for a tournament like the Candidates and the opener was not devoid of it. Praggnanandhaa sprang the first one going for the open Ruy Lopez as black against Alireza.

However as it turned out, the open centre gave enough counterplay and the game took a sharp turn when Alireza went for a pawn sacrifice on move 29 and followed it up with a knight sacrifice on the next turn.

Praggnanandhaa had to find the only possible defence which the Indian did in quick time. The game was drawn vide repetition on move 39. Another game to end through repetition of moves was between Gukesh and Gujrathi.

—PTI

R Praggnanandhaa (right) plays against France's Firouza Alireza (left) in the first round of the Candidates chess tournament in Toronto ***PHOTO: X @FIDE_CHESS***

RCB, RR look to tackle similar worries

JAIPUR, 5 APRIL

Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and high-flying Rajasthan Royals bizarrely have similar worries to address when they face each other in the Indian Premier League here on Saturday.

The eighth place where RCB are currently on the 10-team table is a fair indication of their troubles, but Rajasthan's all-win record so far and the resultant second place do not necessarily mirror their turmoil.

An underwhelming top-order is the intertwining factor between them. RCB top-order comprising skipper Faf du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Cameron Green and Rajat Patidar is a storehouse of talent and explosiveness. But none of them have fired either in isolation or in unison, except star batter Virat Kohli, the current Orange Cap holder with 203 runs, who has made two fifties.

Patidar showed a glimpse of his clean shot-making abilities while registering 29 in their 28-run defeat against Lucknow Super Giants, but he needs to do a lot more to prop up the RCB middle-order. Bengaluru outfit will hope for a reversal at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium, a venue that carries similar traits as RCB's home – Chinnaswamy Stadium – in terms of a smooth pitch and a blistering outfield adding value to the batters' shots.But the aforementioned RCB quartet has company in the Royals' ranks. Yashasvi Jaiswal entered this iteration of IPL on the back of some excellent recent efforts, but the left-handed opener has made just 39 runs from three matches, and Jos Buttler offers a similar story. Rajasthan have an edge over their opponents in the bowling department. Pacers Trent Boult and Nandre Burger and veteran leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal have worked up a nice early rhythm and have shared 16 wickets between them. The out of touch Bengaluru batters might just find it tough to tackle the trio at its home turf.

—PTI

Rajasthan's all-win record so far a do not necessarily mirror their turmoil ***PHOTO: X@ RCB***

TODAY'S MATCH

RAJASTHAN ROYALS | RCB

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Sawai Mansingh Stadium, Rajasthan

Kohli under pressure: Steve Smith

MUMBAI, 5 APRIL

Virat Kohli is "under a lot of pressure" in the ongoing IPL owing to the collective failure of Royal Challengers Bengaluru batters, feels former Australia captain Steve Smith who wants the Indian superstar's RCB teammates to come good in the supporting act.Kohli has waged a lone battle for RCB with 203 runs in four matches at 67.66 with two fifties. The second-best batter, Dinesh Karthik, is way behind with 90 runs in as many games.Glenn Maxwell, Faf du Plessis have been underwhelming so far with the bat. —PTI

CSK post below-par 165 for 5 against SRH

HYDERABAD, 5 APRIL

Chennai Super Kings batters failed to capitalise on their starts as they were restricted to a below-par 165 for 5 in their Indian Premier League match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Friday.

In-form Shivam Dube top-scored with a 24-ball 45 while veteran Ajinkya Rahane contributed a sedate 35 off 30 balls after CSK were asked to bat on a pitch that didn't seem like a proverbial belter. The duo's 65-run partnership for the third wicket from just 6.3 overs was the only highlight of the CSK innings. CSK added only 37 runs in the last five overs and that could be the turning point in the match. But credit must be given to CSK's all-season's man Ravindra Jadeja, whose unbeaten 31 off 23 balls was the added fillip that the defending champions needed at the end. *—PTI*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool on top with win over Sheffield United

LIVERPOOL, 5 APRIL

Liverpool's players overcame an unexpected test of their Premier League title credentials against last-place Sheffield United. Manchester United, meanwhile, went into meltdown at Chelsea.

This was a latest reminder of the gulf that separates English soccer's fiercest rivals ahead of their clash at Old Trafford on Sunday. Liverpool is back on top after a 3-1 win against Sheffield United, while Manchester United conceded two goals in stoppage time in a stunning 4-3 loss at Chelsea.

Liverpool's win further demonstrated the resolve of Jurgen Klopp's team and the growing influence of Alexis Mac Allister, whose stunning second-half strike set up victory. Anfield erupted as the Argentina international unleashed an unstoppable drive from the edge of the box that crashed into the top corner in the 76th minute.

The atmosphere had been getting increasingly tense before that with the game locked at 1-1. Substitute Cody Gakpo added a third for Liverpool in the 90th to make the win look more routine than it was. "We had to dig very deep, but that is normal. Our attitude was good, the football was not great in a lot of moments," Klopp said.

While Liverpool could be knocked off the top again by the time it heads to United on Sunday, the Merseyside club keeps on coming up with the answers as it stares down the challenge of Arsenal and Manchester City.

United stunned

Having conceded late at Brentford, United suffered an even worse collapse at Chelsea after Cole Palmer scored twice in stoppage time to complete a hat trick and an unlikely comeback for Mauricio Pochettino's team.United had looked set to walk away with a morale-boosting win after recovering from a disastrous start — going 2-0 down early through a goal from Conor Gallagher and Palmer's penalty. Alejandro Garnacho and Bruno Fernandes evened the score at 2-2 before halftime and Garnacho headed his team in front after the break.

But Diogo Dalot's clumsy challenge on substitute Noni Madueke earned Chelsea a second penalty and Palmer — a boyhood United fan — converted in the 110th. The drama wasn't over yet. A minute later, Palmer's effort from outside the box was deflected past Andre Onana to seal a spectacular win. *—AP*

Liverpool's win further demonstrated the resolve of Jurgen Klopp's team and the growing influence of Alexis Mac Allister ***PHOTO: X@ CHELSEA FC***

Mohun look to remain in hunt for ISL top spot

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

- Mohun Bagan is a force to reckon with on the road, having garnered 22 points in their away matches so far, which will keep Punjab FC on their toes in this encounter. Punjab FC has not won any of its last three games at home.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant (MBSG) would look to bounce back from their previous defeat and remain in the hunt for a top-spot finish in the Indian Super League when they face Punjab FC behind closed doors at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on Saturday.

The Mariners lost their previous match to Chennaiyin FC 2-3 at home, significantly denting their hopes of catching up with table-toppers Mumbai City FC. Similarly, Odisha FC defeated Punjab FC 3-1, which has complicated matters for both these teams.

Mohun Bagan is a force to reckon with on the road, having garnered 22 points in their away matches so far, which will keep Punjab FC on their toes in this encounter.

Punjab FC has not won any of its last three games at home, and a failure to get three points here will result in the team's longest-ever winless run there in the ISL.

The Mariners have scored 40 goals this season, the most among all teams. They have netted at least thrice in each of their last two away matches.

—PTI

Sebastian Buhler wins Stage 2 at Raid Portugal

NEW DELHI, 5 APRIL

Sebastian Buhler of Hero MotoSports Team Rally delivered a strong performance to win the second stage of the Rally Raid Portugal on Friday. The victory propelled Buhler, a native of Portugal, to second place in overall rankings, a big leap from his sixth-place finish after Stage 1. This is the young rider's first Stage victory so far in the FIM World Rally Raid Championship. "Stage 2 was a little longer than Stage 1. "I tried to push right from the beginning because there was a lot of water on the tracks due to the rain. We will continue pushing through this week for the best final result," said Buhler after the race. Ross Branch, his teammate, completed the stage in eighth place, but moved up to seventh in overall Rally GP Class standings. *—PTI*

Balaji-Begemann advances into ATP Houston SF

HOUSTON, 5 APRIL

Indo-German pair of N Sriram Balaji and Andre Begemann moved to the semifinals of ATP Houston Open with a dominating straight set win over India's Arjun Kadhe and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan. Continuing their good run, Balaji and Begemann, who had earlier stunned top seeds Rajeev Ram and Austin Krajicek of USA, picked up an easy 6-0 6-3 quarterfinal win in 59 minutes on Thursday. The pair will take on fourth-seeded Australian duo of Max Purcell and Jordan Thompson in the US Men's Clay Court Championship semifinals. Balaji and Begemann hit two aces and won 86 per cent (38/44) of their first serve points. Khade and Nedunchezhiyan succeeded in saving 50 per cent of their break points, but Balaji and Begmann were impeccable, saving all five break points against them. *—PTI*

Yuki-Olivetti advances to Marrakech Open SF

MARRAKECH, 5 APRIL

India's Yuki Bhambri and his French partner Albano Olivetti knocked out third seeds Nicholas Barrientos and Rafael Matos to breeze into the men's doubles semifinals of ATP Marrakech Open. The unseeded Indo-French combine upset Colombian Nicholas Barrientos and Rafael Matos of Brazil, eking out a close 7-6(5) 6-7 10-7 win in the quarterfinal that lasted almost two hours on Thursday. They will face second seeds Lucas Miedler and Alexander Erler of Austria in the last-four stage of the ATP 250 event. Ranked 62, the 31-year-old Bhambri is India's second-highest-ranked player behind world number one Rohan Bopanna. It will be interesting to see if Bopanna chooses Bhambri as his partner for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Bopanna being a top-10 player will have the choice of selecting his partner. *—PTI*

Delhi FC winners against Rajasthan United FC

PUNJAB, 5 APRIL

Delhi FC registered a commanding 6-3 victory over Rajasthan United FC in the I-League 2023-24 match at Namdhari Stadium on Friday. The winners led 3-1 at halftime. It was Delhi FC's third consecutive win, thus showcasing their late surge in the league. Rajasthan FC suffered their third straight defeat. Delhi FC took the lead with Vinil Poojary's goal in the 8th minute. The second half saw a dip in Rajasthan United's fortunes as two own goals by Amritpal Singh in the 65th and 87th minutes strengthened the rivals' hands. *—ANI*

BACK ON GAME

F1: Verstappen to use Suzuka circuit to reassert his dominance

SUZUKA, 5 APRIL

Max Verstappen said he found Japan's Suzuka circuit "intimidating" the first time he navigated a Formula 1 car around the figure-eight layout with its high-speed corners and narrow confines.

No longer daunted by Suzuka, the track looks like an ideal bounce-back destination for Verstappen. In the last F1 race two weeks ago in Australia, a fire on his right-rear brakes forced him out on the fourth lap — ending a nine-race victory string.

"I think if you look at Melbourne performance-wise, I think we were quick, but we didn't finish the race," Verstappen said. "So that's not ideal, but our car normally likes the higher-speed corners, so hopefully we can show that again this weekend." That's what's expected Sunday from the three-time defending F1 champion.

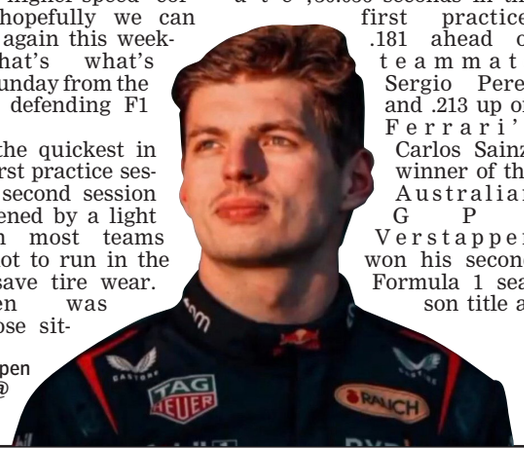
He was the quickest in Friday's first practice session. The second session was dampened by a light rain with most teams deciding not to run in the damp to save tire wear. Verstappen was among those sitting out.

Verstappen clocked 1 minute ,30.056 seconds in the first practice, .181 ahead of teammate Sergio Perez and .213 up on Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, winner of the Australian GP. Verstappen won his second Formula 1 season title at Suzuka in 2022, and he dominated in Japan last season as he won his third straight title.

That race was only six months ago. The Japanese race has been moved to the beginning of the F1 calendar in 2024, dovetailing perfectly with a big weekend in the cherry blossom season across the Japanese archipelago.

Verstappen was asked in Japan about his future with Red Bull, amid rumors about a move to Mercedes. "I'm very happy where I'm at," he said. "And, yeah, we want to keep it that way." "I have a contract with Red Bull until '28," he added. "After that, I first want to see if I actually even want to continue." *—PTI*

Starting grid for the Suzuka Circuit ***PHOTO: X/@ play_coza***



Max Verstappen ***PHOTO: X/@ play_coza***